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IDEALS OF THE EARLY CHURCH

THE RELIGIOUS IDEAS OF ACTS

BY

W. M. GRANT, M.A.

AUTHOR OF "THE RELIGION AND LIFE OF THE PATRIARCHAL AGE," "THE
FOUNDERS OF ISRAEL," "THE JUDGES AND KINGS OF UNITED ISRAEL"

WITH FOREWORD BY

PRINCIPAL DAVID S. CAIRNS, D.D.

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"Experimentally or devotionally read, Acts has continued to appeal to man in all ages, and should appeal most of all to-day, when man has recovered once more some due sense of God as not only above but also very present in His creatures, and chiefly in the human soul."

"Acts (for unique interest and value) has no fellow within the New Testament or without it."—*The Century Bible*.



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FOREWORD

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THE writer of this volume is held in great esteem in the north-east of Scotland as a faithful minister of a country congregation, who has for many years fulfilled the highest ideals of such a charge, studying the greatest literature, yet ever at the service of the humblest of his people—at once a true scholar and a shepherd of men. He is well known far beyond the limits of his charge, also, as a keen educationist, and throughout the whole of his own Church and beyond it as the writer of three admirable Manuals for Bible-class study which have had an unusually large circulation. In this book on the Acts he takes a wider range. He has put into it the fruits of many years of study, and ever-ripening experience.

He has an incomparable theme. The story of the new birth of a worn-out world is one which can never lose its power to hold the spirits of men, and never, surely, has it been of fresher interest than to-day when a great age of civilisation has manifestly wrought itself out, and it seems to many to be as yet an open question if a new and a better epoch has power to be born and to survive the jealous and malignant forces of the past “all watching to devour it.”

No inquiry surely can be more timely than one into the secrets of the life of the earliest age of the Christian faith, its new ideals of life, and the spiritual faiths by which they were realised, “when there was deep sea, and the mighty things.” Can such things in substance happen again, or are they as incapable of repetition as the Periclean age or “the spacious days of great Elizabeth”? Have we here in the Acts the momentous disclosure of powers of the Spirit

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still available for the indefinite expansion and blessing of human life, or the story of what William James calls "over beliefs," faiths which cannot and need not be reproduced to-day, except in some perfectly desiccated and futile form of "reduced Christianity," which can be of no real interest to any living human being?

Mr Grant writes as a convinced and thorough-going believer in the faiths and ideals which he expounds, and is sure that the Acts of the Apostles is only the great proem of the coming triumph of the Spirit of God. The energy of his belief gives the book its kindling power.

But his faith is that of a thoroughly equipped scholar. Few books in the Bible owe more to historical criticism than the Acts of the Apostles. Our knowledge of the secular history of that period has been enormously increased and vitalised since Baur wrote his powerful but arid book on Paul the Apostle, and the same is true of our knowledge of the inner development of Christian life and thought. We realise that this was a far freer and more varied thing than the classical Protestant theology realised. In all this wealth of modern historical knowledge Mr Grant is thoroughly at home. So he has come to one of the most living books of all history with a full and living mind, and the result is a work of accurate knowledge as well as of inspiration.

A well-known conservative volume on the Acts of last generation has been caustically described as "learned, candid, commonplace." Mr Grant's book is certainly learned and candid, but it is anything but commonplace. It is a book to send the reader back to the incomparable original, and that will help him to find new things in it that it deeply concerns him to know.

DAVID S. CAIRNS.

PREFACE

ALL competent witnesses have drawn attention to the difference between the New Testament and the literature of the Greek and Roman world. It is not merely a difference in content, though of course this is very marked; but in the New Testament we come into an entirely new climate of the human spirit, where religious feeling, comfort, and certainty are the prevailing notes: there is a message to the soul.

So much of pagan thought had its interests engaged with the surface of life, that Matthew Arnold, in his criticism of *Theocritus*, sums up with a general estimate of the popular literature of the classical world, "It adapts itself to the tone of a gay and pleasure-loving multitude, people who seem never made to be serious, never made to be sick or sorry. And if they happen to be sick or sorry, what will they do then?" The New Testament has an answer to this question, but elsewhere, there is none.

Even the more serious books of paganism, philosophical and ethical, though they lie outside the verdict quoted above, yet addressed themselves only to the wise and the strong, to choice spirits who could suffer and endure. The Mystery Religions invited

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innocent and stainless souls to be partakers of their fellowship: Mithraism found a response chiefly in the armies. But the ideal of the New Testament is to present *every man perfect in Christ Jesus*: its message came to the poor and distressed, to those who were "down and out"—the sick in body and the sick in soul. The Gospel unified mankind in a common need and a common salvation. Thus, the book, in contrast to the literature of the period, comes with an appeal that wins the heart of every land and age. In striking confirmation of this, we may recall how it was said of a great classical scholar, "He was never satisfied till he came in contact with the fervent heat of the New Testament."

And for *Acts* itself the further claim is made that, in the New Testament itself, it is pre-eminent as a book of Christian origins, thought, and life. Standing, in our version, between the Gospels and the Epistles, it stretches out hands to both.

But the book has suffered in appreciation because so often we read it in detached portions and episodes, with only a scattered impression of its massive wholeness. The writer has sought to gather these *disjecta membra* into one consistent and consequent body of truth, and to present in a unity the *religious ideas* that guided the primitive Church in its Apologetic and Evangelism.

In Luke's narrative these are seen rising out of the historical situation, as apostolic men dealt with "the fact of Christ" and its application to the

needs of the time. In certain aspects the religious ideas of *Acts* differ from those in the Pauline literature, for Luke had his own point of view expressed with a layman's directness and simplicity. On this ground, therefore, his book should appeal to the ordinary man who is not concerned with doctrinal distinctions, but is profoundly interested in what lies behind them—the truths of experience working themselves out in the thought of the Church and the redemption of the world. It has been the aim of the writer of this book to present these primary religious ideas in a form that may be useful to those who are guiding the mind of the youth of our churches into familiarity with essential Christianity.

Acts has been fortunate in the literature that has gathered round it, especially in later years, and to this, as the reader will perceive, the writer has been greatly indebted. This debt has been acknowledged by the quotation marks and references which may serve also as a guide to further study.

A tribute of gratitude is due to Professor J. A. Robertson, D.D., who has read the MS. throughout, and has given invaluable help and counsel without which this book would not have appeared, and to Dr W. M. Rankin, Durris, who by revision and criticism has saved the printed page from many a blemish.

LITERATURE

References have been added at the end of the several chapters to the available literature (in

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English) on each topic. In addition, the great Dictionaries of the Bible, with the relative commentaries and expositions, including the *Expositor's Greek Testament*, will suggest themselves to every teacher and student. The quotations from the New Testament are taken, for the most part, from Dr Moffatt's version.

W. M. G.

DRUMOAK, *July*, 1923.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“Our beloved Luke, the physician, salutes you.”

FOR almost a century, since 1831, when Baur's article, “The Christ-party in the Corinthian Church,” was published, *Acts* has been the storm-centre in the history of the Early Christian Church. No New Testament writing has been subjected to a keener analysis of sources, aims, and tendency. But now, one may venture to say, the book has weathered the storm, and has been regarded as a trustworthy account of the Origins of Christianity, and Luke its author is recognised as ranking in the first class among the historians of the ancient world. In no small measure this change in values is due to the series of brilliant books on the period by Harnack, and Sir W. M. Ramsay.

With the exception of a few critics on “the extreme left,” scholars have taken this result of criticism as something to be accepted and built upon. We come to the book, therefore, as a first-hand document of the Apostolic Age—the record of an eye-witness's experience in the founding of a

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religion. In the course of this critical investigation a whole library has gathered round *Acts*, philological, exegetical, geographical, and historical, and in recent years there have been the articles in the great Dictionaries of the Bible, one of which is devoted exclusively to this period—*The Dictionary of the Apostolic Church*. Yet it is to be feared that the majority of these books have not travelled far beyond the library and the use of the scholar; for searching analysis and minute exegesis make only a limited appeal to the Christian public.

Nevertheless the religious value of *Acts* continues to have a distinction of its own in the literature of the New Testament. The time, therefore, has fully come when, dropping analysis and forming a synthesis, an endeavour should be made to provide for teachers in Bible Schools and Study Circles, not a history of criticism and reconstruction, but a plain and popular account of *the religious ideas* with which Luke works. When these are disengaged from the book as a whole, there emerges a body of religious truth, pure and changeless in value for the twentieth century as for the first.

In certain aspects, *Acts* in the New Testament may be compared with Genesis in the Old. In both books the truths that guide the religious development are almost all to be gathered on the surface and in the history. In *Acts* we find them rising out of the fellowship and service of the religion itself, as men and women yielded themselves to be "vessels" or instruments of the Spirit, used by God to make a Christian world.

Behind the historical facts which the author narrates there are principles and conceptions of

religion that influence him in the selection and use of his materials, and these ideas really inspire the whole course and expansion of the Church. Neither is it a disparagement to Luke as a historian to recognise that his book is not only history but *propaganda*: he too might have said, "These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name" (John 20³¹).

Not the least of the author's aims is to write "a book of religious narratives to teach his contemporaries faith."¹ Out of the mass of his materials Luke selects his narratives not only for their facts, but for the religious values underlying them. These are illustrations of "The Vital Forces" by which Hebraism was transformed into a universal religion with its appeal to "all nations and kindreds and peoples and tongues." *Acts* is at once a history of "representative facts" and the interpretation of history—the story and the persuasion of religious ideas as they are revealed in the words and works of the saints of the Apostolic Age.

Not less revealing are the discourses which abound in the book. Luke, in the manner of Thucydides, is notable for the speeches which he weaves into his narrative. They are, obviously, summaries in which the situation is reviewed, "historical in substance and even to a certain extent in phrasing," with a look of reality about them. Like that of the author of the *Peloponnesian War*, Luke's method is to use documents on the one hand, and speeches on the

¹ For the pragmatic or didactic view of the history, cf. *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*; "Acts," *Westminster New Testament*; Moffatt, *Literature of the New Testament*, p. 305.

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other, and one turns to the latter with special interest, for in them the author not only reveals his conception of the Religion, but at the same time leaves on the page the print of his own religious individuality.

In this connection Sir W. M. Ramsay reminds us : " It is impossible for an author to hide himself completely. Even in the selection of details his personality shows itself." ¹ Luke is self-revealing. In his book we see as in a mirror the reflex of his beautiful mind, the thoughts he loved best and to which he turned most often ; the essential liberality of his soul and the charity of his temper. On the one hand by education, and on the other by a compassionate heart with its feeling for " the tears in human things," he has elect affinities to be the historian of the faith in which there meet the aspirations and the antipathies, and the underlying correspondences of need, in both Jew and Gentile.

Historically Luke's work is of the first importance for the understanding of the Apostolic Age ; *religiously* it is a golden book of faith and life with treasures of religious ideas which make it one of the most rewarding in the New Testament, a book of devotion and of unction. In its pages there gleam the truths that inspire all true religion ancient and modern, and " pierce the night like stars." The breath of the Spirit and the witness of God are here in all sorts and conditions of men and women, Jew and Gentile, bond and free. Here is the mirror of the human soul in sickness and in health. What is Religion ? What is Christianity

¹ *St. Paul the Traveller*, p. 21.

simple and essential? The answer is here. The motto of Acts is undoubtedly found in the words, "Neither is there salvation in any other [name]."

With a fine instinct for the religious values of *Acts*, Schmiedel has marked the passages he would choose for their spirituality and idealism. Here is a brief expansion of that summary in a form that may suggest a fruitful study of *Acts*, viz. :—

1. *Religious Authority*.—"Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you rather than unto God, judge ye : for we cannot but speak the things which we saw and heard" (4¹⁹⁻²⁰) ; "Peter and the Apostles answered and said, We must obey God rather than men" (5²⁹).

2. *The Spirit of the Church*.—"Now there was but one heart and soul among the multitudes of believers" (4³²).

3. *The Breadth of the Faith*.—"What God has cleansed you must not call common" (10¹⁵) ; "I see quite plainly that God has no favourites, but that he who reverences Him, and lives a good life in any nation is acceptable to Him" (10³⁵).

4. *The Most Important Question in Religion and its Answer*.—"Sirs, what must I do to be saved? Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved and thy house" (16³⁰⁻³¹).

5. *The Endeavours of a Christian*.—"They turned back to Lystra, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to hold by the faith, and telling them that we have to get into the Kingdom of God through many a trouble" (14²²).

6. *The Idea of God*.—"God who made the world, and all things in it, Lord of heaven and earth ; men should seek God, if haply they might

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feel after Him, and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us, for in Him we live, and move, and have our being: for we are also His offspring" (17²⁴⁻²⁸).

7. *The Preacher's Gospel*.—"I never shrank from letting you know anything for your good, or from teaching you alike in public and from house to house, bearing my testimony both to Jews and Greeks, of repentance before God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" (20²⁰).

8. *The Heroisms of the Christian Life*.—"But I set no value on my own life compared with the joy of finishing my course and fulfilling the commission I received from the Lord Jesus to attest the Gospel of the grace of God" (20²⁴); "What do ye, weeping and breaking my heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done" (21¹³⁻¹⁴).

9. *The Soul of a Christian*.—"Herein do I also exercise myself to have a conscience void of offence toward God and men all the time" (24¹⁶).

These passages, chosen for their felicity of expression and religious significance, are but handfuls gathered here and there from the book. Its character-studies of outstanding personalities are no less impressive, when we think of Paul and Barnabas, Philip of Cæsarea, Stephen, Cornelius, Lydia, the jailer of Philippi; and, among the unpersuaded, Felix, Festus, and Agrippa.

Round these central ideas, in incident and teaching, Luke gathers the faith and life of the Apostolic Church, and presents "the original picture of the

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religious conceptions and the piety of the earliest Christian community.”¹ The lines of this picture we shall seek to trace in the Religious Ideas which the author has framed in his history. They include sayings and ideals “which are of the deepest that can be said about the inner Christian life.”²

¹ *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, I. “Acts.”

² *Ency. Biblica*, “Acts.”

CHAPTER II

THE SPIRIT

“I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh.”

PAUL is generally regarded as the hero of *Acts*. He is Luke's hero, perhaps, but the glorious and unwearied Worker is the Risen Christ through His Spirit; the book celebrates the victories of the Holy Ghost from Jerusalem in the east to Rome in the bounds of the west. Over these wide spaces the Spirit of the Lord moved, stirring the deep as the tides plough the sea. God said, “Let there be light,” and there was *light* and a quivering dawn on the throbbing and restless world of the Roman Empire. Old things passed away, and gospel ages were ushered in. How this new world came into being by the breath of a diviner life is the subject of *Acts*: this is the Book of the Holy Spirit.

Acts is thus pre-eminent in the New Testament for its *idea* of the Spirit—a doctrine we cannot call it, inasmuch as the time for formal definition in the way of the great creeds has not yet come. We are in the mid-time of the idea where, between the old and the new, with the fluid conceptions of the Old Testament in his mind, the writer is reaching forward but has not arrived at the fulness of view in the Epistles of Paul. He is primitive and pre-Pauline.

How this should be is not difficult to understand. The theology of *Acts* is that of experience, and it came to the early believers not ready-made but in the course of their endeavour to interpret the contents of the Religion of Redemption. By degrees, and more and more, doctrines and creeds grew into being as men thought out into clearer expression the meaning of what they had passed through—what they had seen with their eyes, and looked upon, and their hands had handled of the manifested Word of Life. The whole of that life is behind the New Testament, and called it into being.

Though Luke was not a Jew—he is perhaps the only Gentile writer in the New Testament—yet he drew his religious nurture from the Old Testament. The Greek Version (LXX), with which he is so intimately familiar,¹ became for him, as for so many in his world, the *paidagogos* to bring him into the school of Christ. Naturally, therefore, his religious ideas ran in the mould of the older book. “The streams of Zion” tinged the whole course of his thought.

It could not be otherwise, for even in the new world of Christ, pious souls had behind them the religious tradition which was their heritage from the past; when the new religion came, it did not cast out the past, but fulfilled it, and at every point was in living contact with the older ideas that once had been the nurse of faith and life.

To find a point of approach to the position of

¹ Harnack speaks of Luke’s “masterly knowledge of the Greek Bible”; “in point of language Luke stands by far the nearest of all [the Evangelists] to the LXX.”—*Luke the Physician*, pp. 13, 170.

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St. Luke, one must recall the conception of the Old Testament regarding the Spirit of God. Dr A. B. Davidson states it thus: "Just as man has a spirit which is really his thinking and volitional life manifesting itself, so the fulness of life in God, impressing itself on that which is without, is called *His Spirit*; it broods on the face of the deep, and creates life in man; all thoughts, volitions, and emotions—the whole vitality of man and his endowments of soul—are created by the breath and inspiration of the energising and effectual life of God."

In the earlier ages "the spirit of Jehovah" is a quasi-material energy, but in the post-exilic prophets, and especially in Ezekiel, there is a higher note, and the conception rises; the Spirit not only breathes new life into the dry bones but creates a new *character* in men, so that they live not according to ordinances, but according to Spirit—the Spirit of God.¹ In this, as in certain other aspects, the Old Testament is an evolution from thoughts that sprang in the soil of all Semitic religion. The idea of Spirit is at first only a shade, if even that, removed from the physical, but the thought rises to the conception of God immanent, at work in His world—God in action. Thus *Spirit* becomes a general name for the many operations of God upon the world of nature and man, but always with the underlying idea of manifested power.

It is very doubtful if anywhere in the Old Testament a distinction is made between God and His Spirit. Even the prayer, "Cast me not away from Thy Presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me" (Ps. 51), is not an exception; for, as Dr

¹ Cf. Wheeler Robinson, *Religious Ideas of the O.T.*, p. 110.

The Spirit

Davidson remarks, "personality is not involved in the words; it is the psalmist's prayer that his mind may not cease to be religious and to have thoughts of God and aspirations towards Him." The Spirit of God is God actually present and in operation. "There always attaches to 'Spirit' the idea of power in operation; *the Spirit of God* is God exerting power." So in *Acts* 1⁸, "Ye shall receive power—*dunamis*—when the Holy Ghost is come upon you," *i.e.* the hand of God shall be made manifest in your work. This lays the foundation for the conception with which Luke works.¹

Such, in its general features, is the course of Old Testament thought on the subject. That Luke was familiar with it, and that the expression of his ideas concerning the Spirit was moulded by that of the older religion, there can be no reasonable doubt.

It is important to bear this in mind, and guard ourselves against importing into Luke's conception the fully developed thought of Paul, in whose theology "Spirit" is highly ethical, and takes the place of "Law" in the life of the renewed man. Cf. "Now we have been discharged from the law, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter" (Rom. 7⁶). "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death" (Rom. 8²). But in *Acts*, at first and primitively, *spirit* is not necessarily ethical—perhaps never—but denotes any *abnormal* manifestation of power, considered as marvellous in its origin and its influence. Here

¹ For the O.T. doctrine of Spirit, cf. A. B. Davidson, *Theology of the O.T.*, p. 115 ff.

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Luke stands on the ground of the Old Testament, where all striking effects both in nature and in man are attributed to the Spirit of God. Yet it must not be forgotten that in *Acts*, "holy Spirit" is something greater than the Old Testament conception of *the Spirit of God*. The thought is deeper and richer. The Spirit of Jesus is the Spirit of God, but filled full with the amazing wealth of the human experience of Jesus which came to Him in His incarnate life.

Luke's use of the term *Spirit*, however, varies in a remarkable way. This is veiled from us in the English Version, but in the Greek, twenty references are without the article—*i.e.* *holy Spirit*, which is represented as "falling upon," or "filling men," who are "baptized with holy Spirit." Paul asks the Ephesian disciples if they have received holy Spirit, and they answer, "Nay, we did not so much as hear whether holy Spirit was (given)." In other twenty-three references the phrase appears with the usual article, "The holy Spirit."¹

In the episode concerning the passing over of the Gospel to Europe, there occurs the very remarkable clause—"Having been forbidden of the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia, they essayed to go into Bithynia, and *the Spirit of Jesus* suffered them not" (*Acts* 16⁶⁻⁷). The Spirit of Jesus—a phrase "unique in the New Testament"—is here synonymous with the Holy Spirit, His *alter ego*, and has affinities with

¹ Use of Spirit in *Acts*—Without art. or *holy*, 2.

With art., without *holy*, 14.

Without art., with *holy*, 18.

With art., with *holy*, 23. (16 of which have double art.)

Rom. 8⁹, "Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not *the Spirit of Christ*, he is none of His"; also with 1 Cor. 15⁴⁵, "The last Adam was made a quickening spirit," and with 2 Cor. 3¹⁷, "now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." "The living and exalted Christ and the Spirit whose character He has revealed are practically interchangeable." ¹

On the general interpretation one may accept the words of J. Vernon Bartlet,² who indicates that the author's varying use of "holy Spirit," and "the holy Spirit," "is intended to mark some difference of meaning or emphasis. Nor are the shades of thought denoted by the presence or absence of the article quite obscure. They are, as a rule, those respectively of an influence or force, and of a Person in action. In the one case, emphasis rests on the spiritual phenomenon; in the other on its ultimate cause. The controversy as to whether Holy Spirit, in the New Testament at least, denotes a person or an influence, is really a fruitless one; it certainly has both meanings in different contexts." *Holy Spirit* is divine enthusiasm or power; *the holy Spirit* is God immanent, personally indwelling in His creature man.

Both these thoughts are in *Acts*. Perhaps it is not too much to say that in the book we can recognise the Old Testament conception of Spirit passing, but not yet passed, into what we know as the fully-matured doctrine of the Church. The idea has not uniformly crystallised into the doctrine

¹ C. Anderson Scott, *The Fellowship of the Spirit*, p. 95.

² *Acts*, p. 386 ff.

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of a Person, but, as a Hellenist, Luke mediates between the Hebrew and the Christian meaning. In *Acts* we are in the intermediate stage, between the Testaments, between the conception of a marvellous power and an ethical grace.

II. PENTECOST

“The gift of the Holy Spirit is the most important constant factor throughout the first Christian generation.”¹ But we shall set ourselves at the wrong angle of appreciation if we think of that event as absolutely unique in the story of religion. In the last Welsh revival many visitors came away with the impression—We had thought that Pentecost happened once for all; now we have seen Pentecost again, and recognise that such happenings are “that touch of explosive intensity which in intense psychical experiences may be accompanied by sensations either of sound or of light.” Such a mode of thought recurs again and again in religious revivals. . . . George Fox’s *Journal* is full of picturesque realistic phrases like “the Lord’s power broke forth,” “those that were in the power.” On one occasion when he was moved to pray, “*the Lord’s power was so great that the house seemed to be shaken,*” and again, “*the Lord’s power and glory shone over all.*”²

Nor was the age, even in the Roman world of men and ideas, unfavourable to such experiences. A more intimate and sympathetic knowledge of the

¹ Foakes-Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, *The Beginnings of Christianity*, i. 322.

² *The Fellowship of the Spirit*, p. 41 ff.

time has relieved somewhat the blackness in which apologists were wont to paint "that hard pagan world." It was the time of seekers after God; gropings and longings after a good they could not comprehend passed through and through society. It is not necessary to make too much of the Mystery Religions, of a revived Stoicism, and of other religious cults in the Empire, but it is possible to make too little of them and forget the deeper strains in the soul of paganism. It has been pointed out how eminently favourable the psychological climate of the first century was to such manifestations of the Spirit as we are considering; "There was a widespread diffusion of the Spirit over the Roman world. It was manifested *abnormally* and explosively by extraordinary elevation of human faculties, so that miracles, prophecy, glossolaly, and visions were abundant; more *normally* in great enthusiasm, new courage, liberty of speech, skill in debate, keen insight into, and wise use of Scripture, sound judgment of human character, business aptitude, and comfort in suffering."¹ In *The Beginnings of Christianity* a letter of Seneca is quoted: "God is near you, with you, within you. A *holy Spirit* sits within us, watcher of our good and evil deeds, and guardian over us. Even as we treat Him, He treats us. No man is good without God. Can anyone rise superior to fortune save with God's help?"

But the *physical* manifestations of Pentecost in *Acts 2* are hard to interpret. Luke himself, in the account of them, seems to be moving about in worlds unrealised, and, as he is indebted for the

¹ *Encyc. of Religion and Ethics*, vol. ii., "Holy Spirit."

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story to the tradition of a later time, one wonders if he interprets rightly some of the phenomena in question. Does he confuse the phenomena of Pentecost, or identify them with the glossolalia of a later time ?

If we accept the remark that Luke's tendency is "to materialise the spiritual," we incline to see the tendency here, though, of course, this is inevitable in the description of any theophany whatsoever. The author's words show, how his mind labours to express what the tongue can scarcely utter though the heart may comprehend. "The multitude gathered in bewilderment" (v. 6); "all were amazed and astonished" (v. 7); "they were all amazed and quite at a loss." "What can it mean? they said to one another" (v. 12).

The associations that had gathered round the feast of Pentecost have also, probably, left their colour on Luke's story. In course of time the "Giving of the Law," had come to be commemorated on Pentecost, and Philo repeats a legend or *midrash*, that the Law was proclaimed from Sinai in all the seventy tongues of men. It is more than probable that these accretions to the day mingle in Luke's story, as he seeks in language clearly symbolical to adumbrate the great Christian mystery. The wind, the earthquake, and the fire are the usual accompaniments of a theophany. If we frankly recognise the psychology of similar events, and refuse to materialise the spiritual, or to think of Pentecost as imparting a gift of speaking foreign languages, which was neither needed nor used, we shall be on the way to appreciate the endowment which came to the waiting church on the fiftieth day.

The Spirit

In the early morning (it was not yet nine o'clock) they were all together in one place, waiting in tense prayer for the fulfilment of the Master's promise that He would come to them. The *mode* of His coming is not essential. It is the reality behind the phenomena that the Church must guard, and this reality is evidenced by the change that passed over the Apostles and the brethren. They were filled with holy Spirit, with divine enthusiasm, with grace and power. The Spirit came to them

To pour fresh life on every part
And new create the whole.

"How are we to place ourselves," asks Joh. Weiss, "over against these manifestations and testimonies? As to the facts, only complete domination by prejudice can lead to the denial that in this circle extraordinary things took place. Enthusiasm that swept everything before it, a surging, full tide of feeling, an immediate consciousness of God's nearness, a sense of power without parallel, an irresistible influence over Will and Temperament, and even over the physical conditions of other men—these are indelible features in the historical picture of primitive Christianity."¹

The physical wonder passed away, but left as its deposit the consecrated life and burning zeal of the early Church. Speaking of the revivals of New England, their excitements and spiritual upheavings, Whittier claims a great place for all such in the propaganda of religion:—

So the flood of emotion deep and strong
Troubled the land as it swept along,
But left a result of holier lives.

¹ Quoted in *The Fellowship of the Spirit*, p. 42.

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Have the power and *the saving health* of emotion, especially such tides of feeling as are here described, ever been adequately and wisely recognised by the Church? Many psychologists lament that they have not, and plead for a more sympathetic valuation. But the Old Testament is sure of the intimate connection—"the joy of the Lord is your strength,"—and, to-day, the physiologists are following in its estimate. Professor J. Arthur Thomson, speaking of the cult of Joy, in *The Control of Life*, has the following remarkable statement: "Good news, psychical if anything is, may set in motion a series of vital processes, complex beyond the ken of the wisest. Wordsworth was a better physiologist than he knew, when he spoke of his heart leaping up at the sight of the rainbow, and filling with pleasure at the recollection of the daffodils dancing by the lakeside. Good tidings will invigorate the flagging energies of a band of explorers; a religious joy enables men and women to transcend the limits of our frail humanity." In *Acts* this side of Pentecost is prominent; and we hail the testimony given us by modern science, for it helps us in our approach to the emotions and phenomena of that great day. We had heard the voice before, in an old book which also is wise: we rejoice to hear it again in the words of the moderns who, in their own language, also say,

In dwellings of the righteous
Is heard the melody
Of joy and health.

The *good news* of the physiologist is a happy translation of "gospel," so dear to Paul, and the surety of it enabled "men and women to transcend

the limits of our frail humanity." Shall we not say that Luke also, in his view of the phenomena and sequences of Pentecost, was a better psychologist than he knew?

III. THE EARNEST OF THE SPIRIT

We have seen that the miracle of Pentecost was not in the physical accompaniments, neither in the earthquake, in the wind, nor in the fire, but in the energising of the Church and in the transformed lives of the Christians. This moral miracle remains, not as something that has never happened since and cannot be repeated, but as the age-long revelation to the Church that she is close to the springs of power—nearer than she thinks. What God has once done, for anyone at any time, is an earnest of what can be.

Our age is big with need, but also with opportunity, for in just such a crisis of human affairs God must have something to say to us, something to impart. We are thrown back upon the reserves of God—"How great is Thy goodness which Thou hast laid up in store for them that fear Thee!" "As the tale of bricks is doubled, then comes Moses." When Wesley saw the squalor and sin of a mining town in the North country, he said, "Surely this place is ripe for *the mercy of God*." On the side of our need we are ripe for Pentecost.

The Jerusalem Church was conscious that the risen Christ was coming—at the door—to make them fit; Divine influences were feeling round them like a great sea trying to get in, and, in their dedication, they had resolved to put as few hindrances in

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the way as possible. In faith and endeavour they were a unity ; by prayer they had tuned their heart as a receiver to take in the message ; their eye was on the object to which they were consecrated. Then in a moment " the touch of explosive intensity " fused all feeling and desire into a burning emotion of nearness to God. Spirit met with spirit, power passed through the house that day ; the work was done and the Church reborn. There is a suggestive symbol in the Synoptics,¹ where a woman in her faith touched the hem of His garment, and Jesus perceived that virtue—*dunamis*, power—had gone out of Him.

It is our infirmity that we doubt the certainty of such rebirths of feeling and faith. We need God so much that He will surely come to us if all the doors of our being are open as the day—the confession of dependence, the surrender that yields to the Kingdom of God, and the faith that ventures on the promised power. We do not ask if the vital forces will come as revivals came of old. Yet the new and the old are both in Christ, and every kind of fulness. The wind bloweth where it listeth—the winds of God. We yield to them as we dedicate ourselves—" Come in the old way or come in the new way, but in whatsoever way—Come, Lord Jesus."

Then the power will be with us, such power as men call for in this new age, the power to speak to every man in his own language. Hawthorne, thinking of the saintly fathers and students of New England, says : " But they lacked the tongues of Pentecost—the tongues of flame, symbolising not

¹ Matt. 9²⁰, Mark 5²⁵, Luke 8⁴³. Cf. also Luke 6¹⁹.

The Spirit

the power of speech in foreign and unknown languages, but that of addressing the whole human brotherhood in the heart's native language. These fathers, otherwise so apostolic, lacked heaven's last and rarest attestation of their office, the tongue of flame."

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CHAPTER III

THE NOTES OF THE EARLY CHURCH

“Christ’s faith makes but one Body of all souls.”

WORSHIP, BROTHERHOOD, SOCIAL SERVICE

A FAMOUS saying strikes the keynote of life in the primitive Church—“Truly the Holy Ghost is a lover of concord.” So marked was this spirit that even to the critical outsider it became the distinctive token of the community: “See how these Christians love one another.” To this grace Luke has given classical expression in his glowing words, “These all *with one accord* continued stedfastly in prayer, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren” (*Acts* i¹⁴); “and they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ teaching, and in the fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and the prayers” (2⁴²); *all that believed together*—“a peculiar and pregnant description of membership”¹—had all things common; they used to sell their possessions and goods, and distribute the proceeds among all, as anyone might have need. Day after day they resorted *with one accord* to the temple, and broke bread together in their own homes; they ate with a glad and simple heart, praising God, and looked on with favour by all the people. Meantime the Lord (the exalted Jesus)

¹ Hort, *The Christian Ecclesia*, p. 45.

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added those that were being saved daily to their number (2⁴⁴⁻⁴⁷).

With one accord is one of Luke's favourite expressions, repeated ten times in *Acts*, and occurring elsewhere only once (Rom. 15⁶). "They believed together" is surely a memory of the music of Ps. 133, in the Greek version, where the same word is used, "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together." They all believed together. The picture is, of course, painted with strong lights and few shadows, though these also were not wanting.¹

In that early day there was no break with Judaism, of which the New Faith was but a guild, finding its spiritual home in the temple, for what they had in common with the national Church, and in their own houses, for the distinctive principles of their profession. (The church as a building set apart for worship does not appear in the New Testament.) In the first days, the idea of a separate organisation had not emerged, and the name *Church* (*ecclesia*) in *Acts* 2⁴⁷ has no sufficient textual authority. They preferred to call themselves *The Fellowship* (*Koinōnia*)—which became the name and the golden band that held believers together in the bundle of life, in partnership and contributory help to one another—a Fellowship in the Spirit, and a Fellowship of hearts to keep and cultivate.

The characteristic marks of their common life were four:—

1. Attendance on the teaching of the Apostles.
2. Adherence to the Fellowship.
3. Observance of "the Breaking of Bread."
4. Steadfast continuance in the Prayers.

¹ *Acts* 5¹⁻⁴, 6¹⁻².

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Such is Luke's summary of this amazing uprush of life and springtime in the Church's year.

1. In the centre there is the pulsing nucleus of the Apostolic company, the heart and nurture of the body of believers. The Apostles served themselves heirs to the fine tradition of the Synagogue, which had never put a premium upon uninformed or ignorant devotion. The Scribes had many faults, but they trained Israel in the knowledge of religion, and made the Synagogue a teaching church and school of disciples. With practical wisdom the Apostles now took this duty upon themselves, replacing the teaching of the Scribes by instruction in the school of Jesus.

The Gospels, as written records, had not yet appeared, but in the heart and memory of those who had been eye-witnesses of the life of Jesus, there was an oral gospel more acceptable, and, perhaps, at this stage, more useful than books could be. In this connection Papias¹ records that he always questioned the old men who knew the facts, "for," he continues, "I did not think that what was to be gotten from books would profit me as much as what came from the living and abiding voice." Thus the Apostles instructed the new converts who continued steadfastly "in the teaching," and saved them from the perils of any such new time—the temptation to headiness and uninstructed zeal. They had much to learn and, happily, they were willing, as part of their religion, "to know fully" as Luke prescribes to Theophilus, "the solid truth of what they had been taught." The words suggest the exploring of the grounds of faith and the confirmation of what

¹ c. 150 A.D.

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had first come in a rush of emotion. After the blazing splendours of Pentecost, and its tumults of feeling, there followed, in the wisdom of the Spirit, the Christian School.

A worthy religion repudiates the reproach that ignorance is the mother of devotion. Ignorance is the mother of prejudice. The strength of Methodism flowed from her *Classes*; and in the Study Circles and Student Christian Movement of to-day one finds reasons for believing that we are on the eve of a revival of real religion. Those who have been in active touch with the young men of the army in these years are fully persuaded that no more urgent duty faces the Church than a steadfast resort to *teaching*. "Raise up many disciples" is a golden key to unlock the doors that are shut by prejudged opinions.

Men are often opposed to religion not for what it is, but for what they *think* it is, and many have fallen from religion after having once attained to it, for lack of instruction and confirmation in the vital truths. The early Church made no such mistake. In the midst of seething seas of feeling they not only made converts, but held them by a steadfast attendance upon the teaching; "Let knowledge grow from more to more"; "Add to your faith . . . knowledge." When men are raised from the dead it is evermore the imperative duty to give them something to eat. Even if they be first won by emotion (as many are), they will not be held steadfast without filling their minds with bigger and greater things than they have left. The door that leads into the school is a sure way of escape from the temptations that wait upon the new

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life. This door the primitive Church held wide open.

2. They adhered *to the Fellowship* which knits believers together. Converts found themselves drawn into a warm communion, where all cared for each in the comradeship and fraternity of a household. There was no gap in the Church by which anyone could fall out. The so-called Communism of the first age, however, was not political, static, or organised; it was the outward expression of the love that is lord of all. Under this impulse they used to sell their possessions and goods (real and personal property) and share the proceeds with the needy. The principle that ruled the community of goods in the early Church finds clear expression in the words: "While the property remained, did it not remain thine own?"—"And, after it was sold, was it not in thy power?"¹ That they believed the *Parousia* (the Lord's coming) to be imminent made the way of renunciation easier, but the overmastering motive was "freely ye have received, freely give." "Love took up the harp of life," and the chord of self passed in music out of sight.

The plan succeeded well for a time in a small community, just as it is the working rule in any household where family feeling is stronger than individualism. To ask if it would work in the larger and complex life of the nation, or in the conditions of to-day, is useless. It is the spirit of the thing that is to be followed, and the form cannot be imitated without the accompanying environment. The form itself died out under changed conditions, but left, as its deposit and ideal, the brotherliness and

¹ Acts 5⁴.

comradeship of the Apostolic and sub-Apostolic age.

It would be difficult to over-estimate these. The *Didache*, a very early Church handbook, shows a wonderful picture of the practical sagacity and social tenderness of primitive believers. Spirit-filled with the gift of Pentecost, they kept a firm grasp on every member of the community, watching over them in their common life; they cared for the poor and the sick, fed widows and orphans, visited prisoners, provided hospitality for travellers, and acted as a modern labour-bureau in finding employment for stranded workmen on the road, "So richly did the good works overflow."¹ In Luke's description we see the picture of an *institutional* Church of the first century—"a social power far surpassing all rival organisations and religions." With slight alteration, believers might have used the words of Terence, the famous poet of the Republic—"I am a Christian, and nothing that is human is alien to me." Their programme is in Paul's Song of Love (1 Cor. 13),—the true *Internationale* Hymn.

In recent criticism of the Church nothing is more persistent than the complaint of the lack of fellowship. Often this note may be too strident and *false*, but it expresses a grievous and disabling fact. "The note of the Apostolic Church was joy, natural gladness, no less than spiritual exaltation, manifested in common human relations, in eating and drinking, and in familiar intercourse. The sin of the modern Church has been coldness, isolation, the lack of strong bonds of human feeling and interest. In a truly consecrated Church there

¹ Cf. *Didache*, 12, 3; also Dobschütz, *Dict. Apost. Christ.*, in loc.

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should be present high temperatures of human joy.”¹

A Church may be spuriously spiritual, having no voice for a man's work and wages, his body, his home, and his citizen-life, from which we are sometimes headed off on the plea that they are outside the Church's sphere—that they are not spiritual. But, surely, it is amazing one-sidedness to think so. These are not material things at all, for they are the product of human personality, and personality is not material, it is spiritual, and the most sacred thing God has given us to know. Even work and wages are the product of personality, and, rightly regarded, are spiritual issues.

One bows down in humility before this Pentecostal Church which linked the whole of a man's life in the bonds of *The Fellowship*. The form of the Fraternity is immaterial, but the spirit of it, as a necessity in religion, stands knocking at the Church's door for recognition and welcome.²

3. The Fellowship of the brethren took a distinctively sacramental form in what is known as “the Breaking of the Bread.”³ The origin and meaning of this rite have been much discussed, and parallels have been sought in many directions, *e.g.* in the funeral feasts common all round the Mediterranean, often memorial in their nature; or in the common meals of the guilds in the Greek cities, which were not unknown among the Jews. Another

¹ Report on Church Life and Work, United Free Church Assembly, 1905.

² For the Fraternity of the early Church, cf. Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*, chap. 15.

³ *Acts* 2⁴²⁻⁴⁶, 20⁷.

view makes "the Breaking of the Bread" merely an application of the Community of Goods—a *charity meal*; its mention, however, by Luke as a separate feature does not favour such an interpretation.

All these explanations of origin and form seem too far removed from the practice of the Jewish-Christian Church. "The Breaking of the Bread" had, in the disciples' memory and in Luke's sources, a more specific and far-shining reference. In his gospel he recalls how the risen Christ appeared to the travellers at Emmaus, and "as He sat at meat with them, He took bread" (the loaf, as in *Acts*) "and blessed and brake and gave unto them."¹ So Hort interprets: ² "We have 'the Breaking of the Bread,' what we call the Holy Communion, named here from the expressive act by which the unity of the many as partakers of the one Divine Sustenance is signified." The striking symbolism of our Lord's action took deep hold of Christian memory, and it is almost impossible to refuse the inference that it was this they recalled and perpetuated when they broke bread together in their own homes. As often as they did it, they saw the Lord at their common table and "knew Him." They were united to Him in the one Bread which He had broken; it was a true fellowship-feast and Communion. When they went deep enough down into their own hearts, they found their Lord there, and their brethren, one bread, one Lord, and one common life.³

¹ Luke 24³⁰.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 44.

³ For this social element in religion, cf. Robertson Smith, *The Religion of the Semites*, pp. 264-268.

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In his "Vision of Sir Launfall," Lowell has given timeless expression to the underlying thought in this primitive rite, both on the spiritual and, more especially, on the social side.

This crust is my body broken for thee,
This water His blood, that died on the tree,
The Holy Supper is kept indeed
In whatso we share with another's need.
Not what we give, but what we share—
For the gift without the giver is bare ;
Who gives himself with his alms feeds three—
Himself, his hungering neighbour, and ME.

4. Thus, by word and symbol, the life of the brotherhood was nourished. Faith in their right to the Kingdom of God was the dynamic force in the young life of the Church. In the earliest sacrament they had their vision of the ever-present Jesus, and the spirit of prayer kept them alert and buoyant. So the story testifies, "They continued stedfastly in the prayers." This vital breath of believers was dear to the soul of Luke. In his gospel he lingers lovingly over the prayers of our Lord, and, more than the other Evangelists, he delights to represent Jesus as a man of prayer. He alone tells us how Jesus prayed for Peter, and to the same Evangelist we owe the only record of the two prayers on the Cross—"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"; and "Father, into Thy hands I commend my Spirit."

This water-line in Luke's writing is prolonged and intensified in *Acts*, in which there are no fewer than sixteen references to prayer. He tells us when and how and for what men prayed. Prayer rises like

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a fountain in the life of the community. It is "the waters of refreshment" by which God restores the soul of the Church. The prayers of *Acts* furnish in themselves a brief manual and directory to the devotions of primitive Christianity—"It was a community given to prayer. . . . Prayer was at once the source and seal of the spirit of brotherhood."¹

The prayers in which they continued steadfastly were "apparently Christian prayers in common, which took the place of the prayers of the synagogues."² In the Temple "the house of prayer," in private houses, and, no doubt, also in the synagogues, from which they had not yet separated, Christians practised the presence of God by prayer and intercession.

So the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.

Reference has already been made to the manifold activities of the Church, but as these went on, both *Martha* and *Mary* dwelt together in unity. The outward life of service was redeemed from bustle and scattering haste by the wellspring of prayer into which the roots of service went deep down. One thinks of their life as a garden enclosed, filled with the music of the streams that rise in the hills of God.

So the life of *the Fellowship* never grew stale nor harsh: "They did take their food with exultant joy and openheartedness, praising God, and having favour with all the people." In our own day psychologists and other wise masters in the cure of

¹ *Dictionary of Apostolic Christianity*, i. 201.

² Hort, *op. cit.*, 45.

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the soul have borne striking testimony that, for inward peace, for the anodyne of the sick soul, and for sustained vitality, there is nothing to equal the practice of free, regular, and unconstrained prayer. In later days the Church has been more inclined to follow the example of Martha than that of Mary, and men and women become impatient with themselves and with others. But *Acts* shows us the picture of the brethren "whose souls had been touched by a great experience of the Divine nearness and goodness such as expels egoism, suspicion, and all selfishness." And, since they first sought the Kingdom, there was added to them, over and above, what the Church of to-day is seeking, often wisely, but sometimes with feverish haste in dubious ways—"the favour of all the people." Such a spirit as theirs, "everywhere and always appeals to the masses, to the heart of the people, to the humble folk who have a sure instinct for human goodness as such." ¹

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¹ *Century Bible*, "Acts," p. 154.

CHAPTER IV

THE FREEDOM OF THE FAITH

"They are slaves, who dare not be
In the right with two or three."

THE question of the Limits of Obedience in Church and State emerged in a conflict with the ecclesiastical authorities (who had also extended civil jurisdiction) over the healing of the lame man (*Acts* 3). The disciples, Peter and John, in their defence pushed home the obvious conclusion that the miracle was due to the power of the risen Jesus as the Pioneer and Inaugurator of life. But such a challenge on an issue so vital united all divergent parties of the Sanhedrin in energetic protest; the initiative was taken by the Sadducees.

Their disbelief in the resurrection of the dead influenced them, and with this, their fear lest the multitude should hold them guilty of the Crucifixion, "Here, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine! You want to make us responsible for this man's death!"¹ but, probably, motives of political expediency also loomed largely in the background. This aristocratic party, playing for place and privilege, discountenanced all movements, Messianic or secular, that might bring down upon them the ever-vigilant and heavy hand of Rome. This fear is evident in the words of Caiaphas when the plot was made against Jesus—"If we let Him alone, like this,

¹ *Acts* 5²⁸.

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everybody will believe in Him, and then the Romans will come and suppress our holy Place and our nation. . . . You do not understand that it is in your own interests that one man should die for the People, instead of the whole nation being destroyed.”¹

They adopted the policy, therefore, of discouraging all interchanges of thought and opinion likely to raise vexed questions. “True or false,” they said, “you must not discuss them.” It is the age-long controversy between religions of authority and that of the Spirit, the endeavour, never more than temporarily successful, “to tune the pulpit” to be the echo of the dominant party in Church or State. But the Apostles, refusing the injunction of silence, to their offence added the boldness (*parrësia*—outspokenness) of choosing the temple precincts for the propagation of their faith.

Without lingering over Peter’s defence, we shall come at once to the ban laid on the disciples, “not to speak at all or teach in the name of Jesus.” To this they gave the immortal answer, “Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you rather than unto God, judge ye.” In a further interview they added the words, in themselves half-battles, “We must obey God rather than men.” This at once raises the most modern of issues, the rights of conscience, freedom of speech, and the limits of civil and ecclesiastical obedience, that large and vital question—“The Liberty of Prophesying.”

In their claim the Jewish Christian Church had behind them a constant tradition of liberty and free speech, which was a heritage from Hebrew history

¹ John 11^{48, 50}.

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and the Old Testament—a book that in many a page has justified its claim to be the Book of the rights of man. But it would be unfair to forget, in discussing the Religious Ideas of the *Acts of the Apostles*, that *parrësia* must have peculiarly appealed to the Greek-speaking Luke. If there be anything in the conjecture that makes him a Macedonian, either by birth or residence, then he came from a land where such liberty was native to the soil. As an educated man, also, who had at command a considerable range of Greek literature, he could not be ignorant of many a fair page in which *parrësia* is vindicated as the right of the freeborn man. Socrates claimed it in his *Apologia* before his judges : “Men of Athens, I pay my respects to you, and I love you, but I shall obey God rather than you.” Without forcing the connection, one may well believe that Luke the Hellenist records with special favour and appreciation the harmony of Jerusalem and Athens in this vindication of the rights of conscience.

The claim, whether of Athenian sage or Christian disciple, has been well described as an inspiration and rallying-call to conscience for untold generations. It is, perhaps, the one voice of human history which, more than any other, has been the warden and the protagonist in the battles of freedom. Luther and Knox have set their seal to it, with many another standard-bearer besides, and it has found noble expression in the Westminster Confession of Faith : “God alone is Lord of the Conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are in anything contrary to His Word or beside it in matters of faith and worship. . . .

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The requiring of an implicit faith and an absolute or blind obedience is to destroy liberty of conscience and reason also."

A somewhat trite quotation has taught us that "conscience doth make cowards of us all." But the obverse is still more indubitably true. All the heroisms of history have had their birth in the conscience of men who dared to speak the thing they would.

When duty whispers low, "Thou must,"
The youth replies, "I can."

This ennobling strength of conscience is seen in the transformation of Peter's character. In the thought of *Acts* it is the victory of the spirit of Jesus, that a disciple, once intimidated by fear and the pert question of a girl, now stands unabashed and fearless before the authorities of his nation in the liberty of a Christian man. Warmhearted and impulsive he always was, but now, "with calm fixed determination," he wastes no words. The hearts of freemen respond to one another in all times and countries; Socrates, the Athenian philosopher, and Peter, the Galilean fisherman, alike say, "We must obey God rather than you."

Dr Maclaren ¹ asks: "Whence did this man get the power to lay down once for all the foundation principles of the Limits of Obedience, and of the duty of Christian confession?" The answer is plain. At Pentecost it was said concerning Jesus, "He hath shed forth this which ye now see." Among the gifts of the Spirit none are more notable than the heightening and enriching of character.

¹ *Bible Class Expositions*, "Acts," p. 47.

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“Tongues shall cease,” *glossolalia* and all the rest of it, but the inworking of divine strength, the entrance of the Godlike through the portals of the human spirit, is the true and abiding Pentecost, and nowhere are its gifts more manifest than in this famous scene. Throughout the narrative Luke holds to his intention to write the record of the Acts of the risen Christ through His holy Spirit.

He makes the coward spirit brave.

And the sanity of it all is as apparent as the courage. Through the wisdom of the Spirit the Apostles were saved from being merely self-assertive, and from that lower deep of being “cranks,” which are the obvious dangers in every such claim as was now made. Conscience, like liberty, has often been wounded in the house of her friends. But here nothing is exaggerated or forced—only the calm mind and the resolute will; no self-pity or reluctance to pay the price of liberty. If they cannot magnify the law by obedience, they will honour it along that high, hard road of suffering by which brave men have taught the world the steps of a nobler life. To assert liberty is not enough; the great victories of freedom have been won by the will to suffer for it. “They therefore departed from the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the Name.”¹

On such foundations apostles built the Christian Church. There was no other alternative. They had not to deal with questions of opinion (so many men, so many minds), but with the testimony to facts. In this there can be neither compromise nor

¹ Acts 5⁴¹.

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uncertainty, and one does well to remember that the verdict of experience, from the man who honestly gives it, is also a fact, the most incontrovertible in the world.

In the *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*¹ there are careful and illuminating articles—"The Authority of Christ" and "Authority in Religion"—which deal with this subject. A summary may be quoted, (1) "It is the inalienable prerogative of every man to verify for himself the truth of a proposition before assenting to it as true, and to verify for himself the rectitude of a command before yielding to it. (2) The individual is to be left wholly untrammelled in the exercise of his judicial rights regarding every question of truth or duty with which he finds himself confronted—not only does Jesus reprobate physical force (in matters of religion and conscience), but also a tyrannical public or ecclesiastical opinion." Here the Apostles stood: conscience is not to be put down by the exercise of authority either in Church or State.

Yet, primitive Christianity was not anarchism—far from it. There is high doctrine as to the duty of obedience either in doing or suffering, in the correspondence of Paul, who himself was perhaps "somewhat of an imperialist" in his exaltation of the civil power. But more to the point in the present connection, Peter's speech in Acts has a close and vital harmony with the doctrine in his First Epistle,² "Be subject to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king as supreme, or unto governors as sent by him for vengeance on evil-doers, and for praise to them

¹ I. 146 ff.

² I Peter 2¹³⁻¹⁴.

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that do well. . . . This is acceptable if, for conscience toward God, a man endureth griefs suffering wrongfully." We cannot better this statement on the one side or the other, for the life of the Founder of Christianity stands behind it not only filling the conscience with clear light, but also suffering in His suffering members. "Whenever a noble deed is done a bell rings somewhere," and men hear its call.

In his poem "Each and All," Emerson pays his tribute to such influence :

"The sexton, tolling his bell at noon,
Deems not that great Napoleon
Stops his horse, and lists with delight,
While his files sweep round yon Alpine height ;
Nor knowest thou what argument
Thy life to thy neighbour's creed has lent."

At this point, when the courageous testimony of the Apostles was confirmed by the inward testimony of the Spirit in the hearts of the people, Luke again introduces his formula of progress—"The word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem exceedingly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith." Witness-bearing is the guarantee of the life of the Church. If it be true in art that a painter's first business is to go out and see something, and then in word or on canvas unfold as faithfully as he can the vision the eyes of his heart have seen, it is supremely true in religion. The witness of the lips and of the life has been the open secret of the progress of the Church of Christ; for the most fruitful contribution she can make to the life of the world is the capacity of feeling deeply

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the Christian message, and then "forth-telling" her experience at first hand, with her eye on the object. One recalls the vivid words of the Psalmist, "I believe when I speak,"¹ and Paul adds his inspired commentary—"we also believe, and therefore speak."² Professor W. M. Macgregor illustrates this working faith from Coleridge, who asked about Daniel O'Connell, why he was so triumphant in debate and in action: "Because he asserts a broad principle, and acts up to it, and rests all his body upon it;" and again he quotes Bagehot on Gladstone, "He has a nature towards his audience. He is sure that if they only knew what he knows, they would feel as he feels, and believe as he believes, and by this he conquers. One believer who rests his whole body on what he believes is worth fifty who are half-hearted."³

Such, in its intensive influence, was the *parrësia* of the early Church; not only in Jerusalem but in the adjacent districts round the capital the word of God *ran* and was glorified.

And so it comes to be that the path of brave sincerity is the pathway to influence and progress as well.

Oh, what is Heaven but the fellowship
Of minds, that each can stand against the world
By its own meek and incorruptible will?

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³ *Some of God's Ministries*, p. 201.

CHAPTER V

STEPHEN, THE PIONEER

“Faith, made whole with deed,
Breathes its awakening breath
Into the lifeless creed.”

STEPHEN, “a brief but blazing star,” shines in the sky of the Apostolic Church with a lustre brighter than that of any name save Paul’s. Augustine spoke deeper than he knew in his memorable words :

If Stephen had not prayed,
The Church would not have Paul.

For Stephen was the pioneer on the road of liberty, and marked the track for others to follow. His *apologia*, in which he contended for the spirituality and universalism of the Christian Faith, is one of those events about which we ask, “Had it not been for that . . .” ? Luke’s method, by which he concentrates on Peter and Paul, somewhat dims Stephen’s far-reaching importance in the development of early Christianity, and makes him only an *episode* in the history. But so also is *Achilles’ wrath*, though there might have been no *Iliad* without it.

The events that brought Stephen into the stream of history and the sunlight of the word are told in the 6th chapter of *Acts*. In the course of

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the management of the Common Fund,¹ now so well established as to become "a daily ministration," the Hellenists (Greek-speaking Jews) complained that their widows were overlooked in the distribution of the relief. As provincials, they had fewer friends to speak for them than the Jerusalem Christians had, and their complaint was probably well founded. The Fellowship had become a large body which Luke calls the *plēthos* or multitude, more accurately the "Community," a title which shows the beginning of a corporate life, for the word is found in the Inscriptions to designate a religious guild or society. But with the increase of numbers in the Church something of the unity and family life had been lost.

The wisdom of the Spirit-filled leaders, however, and their democratic instincts were equal to the emergency. Though refusing to take upon themselves the administration of the Fund, they cordially agreed to establish a common board of management (like the Committee of a Charity Organisation Society), to supervise the distribution of the Church's alms. Nomination to this office was left to the Church meeting—the community of the disciples. That the *Fellowship* was no close corporation, with power and administration centred in a few official members, but was, from the early days, a genuine democracy based upon the people's will, is manifest, "The appointment of *The Seven* is a sign that the *Ecclesia* was to be an *Ecclesia* indeed, not a mere horde of men ruled absolutely by the Apostles, but a true body politic, in which different functions were assigned to different members, and

¹ 4³⁻⁴.

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a share of responsibility rested upon the members at large, each and all; while every work for the *Ecclesia*, high and low, was of the nature of a ministration, a true rendering of a servant's service."¹

By their action, the leaders showed that not in vain had they pondered the words of the Church's Lord, "The Kingdom of God is like a man leaving his house to go abroad; he puts his servants in charge, each with his work to do" (Mark 13³⁴). In the same spirit, the apostle Peter says to those in high position, "Take charge willingly, not by way of lording it over your charges" (1 Pet. 5³). The breath of religious freedom and democracy blows through the church of the New Testament.

"The Twelve," however, laid down the qualifications for the office: "Look ye out, brethren, from among you, seven men of good report, full of the Spirit and of wisdom." More than likely there is a backward reference to that Mirror of Magistrates held up by Moses in the appointment of elders in Israel (Ex. 18²¹).

The choice of the Church fell upon certain men, known as *The Seven* ("deacon" was a later title of a different office), who all bore Greek names. Almost certainly they were Hellenists, chosen with cordiality from the aggrieved section, and "a notable recognition of them"; the worldly wisdom of the arrangement is conspicuous. Only two of *The Seven* have left marks in the history of the Church—Stephen, the protagonist and martyr of liberty, and Philip, the practical worker and Evangelist, whose headquarters seems to have been at Cæsarea, and who

¹ Hort, *The Christian Ecclesia*, p. 52.

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should not, probably, be confused with Philip the Apostle.¹

These officers, however, were more than almoners, though they first cross the light of Scripture in that capacity; their appointment showed that the Church was enlarging its outlook and widening its base—"lengthening its cords and strengthening its stakes." One may note here the remark of Renan, that the election of *The Seven* was "a proclamation of the truth that social questions should be the first to occupy the attention of man, and that 'deacons' were the best preachers of Christianity!" But this saying, like others in *The Apostles*, has the defects of its qualities.

Six of the number have no attribute attached to their name, but Stephen, who stands first in the list, is described as a man full of faith and holy Spirit; and again (in all the best MSS.), "full of *grace* and of power." This epithet Luke reserves as his highest praise: "Jesus increased in *grace* with God and with men" (Luke 2⁵²); "they wondered at the words of *grace* that proceeded from His mouth" (Luke 4²²).

The Seven were formally set apart for their office by the Apostles: "When they had prayed, they laid their hands upon them"; *i.e.* they followed the Hebrew custom used in *blessing* or in giving authority for an office, as in the ordination of a rabbi. We should note that the *grace* symbolically represented in "the laying on of hands" is assumed as present from the first in the chosen men, and is the condition of their choice. Their *recognition*

¹ The identity is, however, a debated question, though the positive view has strong advocates. *Evangelist* may be an honorary title because of his remarkable success in a rôle dear to the Church.

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gave assurance that they had Apostolic influences behind them, and the goodwill of the *Fellowship*.

Luke is most sensitive to the inwardness of events, and, with the feeling that history is determined by personality, he devotes a large space in the story of the primitive Church to Stephen. Of his previous religious outlook we know nothing : like Melchizedek and Elijah, he comes on the scene in the full maturity of his power. But such a man could never have been the mere administrator of the charity fund. His ministry was also of the Word : this has been called an extra-ministry, but probably the former was accidental, and this his true sphere—his *métier*.

In Jerusalem there were two *foreign* synagogues, that of the N. African colonists, to which Stephen naturally belonged, and the synagogue of the Asiatic colonists, the spiritual home of Saul of Tarsus. In the interchange of thought, it is probable that Stephen and Saul had met on the floor of some synagogue before they faced each other in the Council. If the future apostle was already “kicking against the pricks,” one can well understand the poignancy of repentance which breathes in the words as he himself was fighting for his life in the same city : “When the blood of Stephen thy witness was shed, I also was standing by, and approving, and keeping the garments of them that slew him” (Acts 22²⁰). A modern poet with this in his mind makes the Apostle put sadly away from himself the title of saint.

Saints, did I say ? with your remembered faces,
Dear men and women, whom I sought and slew !
Ah when we mingle in the heavenly places
How will I weep to Stephen and to you !

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Many of the Hellenists were but indifferent Jews, but to others the temple and its cultus, by a well-known psychological law, had a veneration which distance made only deeper and dearer. It was against this perfervid feeling of religious patriotism that Stephen found himself opposed in his interpretation of the Faith. He alone among primitive believers had apprehended "the radical consequences of the Gospel." The official heads or *pillars*, as they came to be called, failed to realise all that was involved in the teaching of Jesus concerning the spirituality and the universal range of His message. Yet it was all there to those who had the open eyes of the heart; for, as one says, "the Fountain of Catholicity is in the unique personality of Jesus of Nazareth."¹

But the disciples, though they had accepted Jesus as the Christ, still clung to the old ways and the old faith, both in its depths, and in its narrowness of outlook. Matthew Arnold, himself a son of Oxford, speaks of that city "steeped in sentiment, spreading her gardens to the moonlight, and whispering from her towers the last enchantments of the Middle Age." Such at this period was Jerusalem, and even the Christian Church. It was Stephen that broke the dreaming sleep, and forced a decision on their failure to understand what the prophets and the Master had spoken. This brought on the catastrophe in which the leader was to perish and his cause to triumph.

Luke, in his lifelike narrative, so true to the situation, shows us that people, elders, and priests, who formerly had spoken with divided voices

¹ Martineau, *The Seat of Authority*, p. 631.

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regarding the Church ¹ were now combined against Stephen. This in itself is evidence that his preaching had struck a new note, which was the prelude to a more spiritual interpretation of the Christian message ; to answer for it the innovator was brought before the Sanhedrin.

False witnesses and garbled statements helped the prosecution, but in essence the charge was relevant ; he had been heard saying that " Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place and shall change the customs which Moses delivered unto us." According to the Jewish law, this was the blasphemy of which Stephen was accused.

We need not follow the successive steps of his address which is a review of the spiritual currents that from the first run through Jewish history. His answer to the charge, or what lay behind it, is to dwell on the fact that the ceremonial law and the temple worship were neither original nor " final nor absolutely essential means of grace." Behind Moses there was Abraham, the father of the nation who had received the promises and the covenant long before there had been either Law or Temple ; the prophets were also on his side, for they pleaded against both in the interests of a spiritual and inward interpretation of the religion of Israel.

Stephen's defence has been described as " a reading of history in the light of a religious experience, a light that is intensified as the speech proceeds and closes with a flash of lightning."

This is a subject dear to the heart of Luke, who, as has been said before, wrote history, not only for

¹ Cf. *Acts* 5²⁶⁻⁴².

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the facts, but for the religious ideas that lay behind them. In this respect Stephen's speech, the longest in *Acts*, and lifelike with the breath of history, is eloquent of purpose—to expound the germinal truths involved in the Christian faith, to be a skilful *apologia* for Christianity, and a repudiation, in the hearing of the Roman world, of Judaism with its lawlessness and persecuting instincts.

Stephen perished in an outburst of fanaticism culminating in a riot; whether this happened with, or without, the connivance of the Roman authorities the history does not say. Pilate the governor was tottering to his fall; the Imperial Government was in a state of transition; but with this Luke is not concerned. Only the implications and consequences of the martyrdom are set forth, in one of the most vivid pages of the Church's history.

We have already anticipated the significance of Stephen in the evolution of Christianity as a faith addressed to the world, and carried home by the consecrated adventure of the Church's mission; Augustine has suggested to us the immediate influences of the martyr's life and thought; for Paul, in systematising into definite theological conceptions the ideas of Stephen, was giving body and form to what was implicit in the mind of the Church almost from the beginning.

But the episode has issues for our own time both as inspiration and warning. It is a page of history that ought never to be far from the Church's mind and heart. Sir W. M. Ramsay¹ thus marks the outstanding influence of the whole story: "The difficulties in which the Church was placed, which

¹ *St. Paul the Traveller*, p. 373.

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would have killed a weakly life, only stimulated its vigour and its creative energy. This creative vitality is to the historian the most interesting side of the early Church ; it was free from dead conservatism ; it combined the most perfect reverence for its earliest form with the most perfect freedom to adapt that form to new exigencies ; it did not stifle growth on the plea that it must remain exactly as it was. It was growing so rapidly that it burst through its earliest forms, before they could acquire any binding force, or fix themselves in the prejudices of its members. This free, untrammelled expansion was the law of its life, and the divine reality of its being. In later times, on the contrary, many of its adherents have maintained that its divine life lies in its preserving unchanged from the beginning the form that was prescribed for it. The view taken in *Acts* is that the Church's divine character lies in the free, unceasing growth of its form and institutions ; but the common view of later times has been that its divine character lies in the permanence and unchangeability of its form from the beginning onwards." ¹ To the same effect, Principal Rainy denounced as "thoroughly ungodly the idea of a Church consenting to be held absolutely and for ever by the faith of men who died two hundred and fifty years ago." And yet, "the dead hand" still lies far too heavy on the Church of to-day, and is the cause of its paralysing numbness in gathering the young life of the country within its saving influence.

It is told of a native of a northern town that, returning after many years to the home of his youth, he remarked how "everything had changed except

¹ *St. Paul the Traveller*, p. 373.

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the sea and his minister's first prayer." The somewhat acid comment may reflect the current dissatisfaction with the stereotyped expression of the Church's life. Yet science has taught us that variation and continuity are great laws in the struggle for life, and the one not without the other. The lessons of history and the verdict of religious experience, as it thinks out the contents and implications of the faith, are not less decisive that variation and continuity are also necessities in the spiritual edifice of the Church, which is ever being built up in the experience and "moods of faith" of believers.

In "The Pearly Nautilus," Holmes has described how nature in one of the humblest of her creations perfects her glorious tasks. Year by year a new spiral is added to the shell; the nautilus always lives in the upper room, but through all the spirals the silver cord of life runs continuously by which each stage is linked to the higher. Such things are a parable of the "more stately mansions" of the Church's life and service.

Within a few years of its birth, Christianity in deepening experience, and through the leading of the Spirit, saw the necessity for a very radical reconstruction and reinterpretation of her form and her creed. Dr Sanday¹ calls attention to the changes of interpretation, emphasis, and value, in the teaching of Christ and the Apostles, and pronounces them more revolutionary than the most radical ventures of criticism in a changing age.

In this respect Stephen was revolutionary, in so far as he worked for the reinterpretation of the Church's worship and message. For such a man

¹ Quoted by Moffatt, *The Approach to the New Testament*, p. 26.

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Judaism had no room, and, for a time, it was doubtful if room could be found for his followers in the early Jewish-Christian Church. Form and tradition seemed to be sacrosanct there also.

But it was not so with the Lord and Master of us all. This is seen in His handling of the Old Testament, and His use of it by quotation—a method which stands alone in the New Testament. In one of His far-reaching words, penetrating to the very heart of religion, Jesus said: "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." This is not an incidental decision but the enunciation of the vital principle that institutions, even the most venerable, are made for men, and not men for institutions.¹ Here Stephen stood, a disciple who had received more of the spirit of Jesus in this respect than The Twelve.

The importance of this crisis, as a fresh start in the life of the Christian community, is evidenced by the length and sympathetic eagerness of Luke's narrative. One might truly write: "Here beginneth the new life," for it takes us right into the heart of one of the most urgent of present-day problems in religion.

The hesitancy and dread of variation in form, or even in doctrine, which meet Christian workers everywhere, come ill from Churches whose standard is the New Testament. For in it we find an ample variety of religious experience and approach to the Christian life and teaching. There is nothing static; all is pulsing with vitality under the breath of *The Creator Spiritus*. Paul, John, Peter reflect the Light of the World in different colours—the same

¹ The late Principal Iverach.

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sunlight but tinged with the refractions of their own personality. And in *Acts* the Religious Ideas of Luke are not a reproduction of any of the three; he has his own *nuances* and distinctions. The same feature is found in the Old Testament, where the development from age to age, both in theology and in morals, marks the successive ventures of a historical religion. We can trace a like evolution in Church history, in which the apprehension of truth as it is in Jesus is deepening and extending in ever-widening circles, from Mediævalism into Renaissance and Reformation. Each age is discovering Christ, *its own Christ*, ever more and more. Jesus manifests Himself to His disciples and to us continually "in another form"; and God has still more light to break forth from His Holy Word.

In the Mission field this truth has been felt by workers who are face to face with the problem in which religious needs and the satisfying of them react against mere form and institutions. An Indian student once complained to the writer, "You bring *your* Christ to India in a dress, in a Church, and religious ideas that are western, and not universal." There is something in the complaint, both for India and for England.

Christianity is the religion of the Spirit, the creative spirit, that makes its own environment and chooses its own form. It may be that religion is waiting the moment for an amazing expansion at home and abroad, when, in the breath of the Spirit, the Church will not fear change, and will not insist that the cup of salvation shall always take the same form. If it holds the water of life nothing else matters. The *odd* charge was made in 1904 against

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the United Free Church of Scotland that it had lost its identity! It gave men furiously to think on the New Testament conception of the Church, and on the difference between spirit and form. Any Church that we read of in its pages had its identity in Christ alone; only apart from Him could the Church—the humblest body of believers—be moved from its foundation on the Living Rock.

But while variation is the mark of the Church's life, continuity is not less so. The last disaster of an army is to be cut off from its base. The silver thread of its life must not be broken. Stephen *the Revolutionary* held the Head—"being full of holy Spirit he looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing on the right hand of God." From this—one of the earliest indications of confessions and creeds—no Church can depart and live. The primitive Church, in separating itself from Judaism, surrendered much, but it kept its soul, it kept the faith and the guarantee of its life.

Individualism is a great truth, but it does not fill the whole heaven and the whole earth. "The story of the religion in its progress is a warning against false starts and impetuous individualism; the interests of Christianity are not served best by those who endow themselves with the title of "prophetic," and break away from the historical base of their religion."¹ It is the tempting danger of an age fermenting with change, for religious Bolsheviks—often innocent and unconscious—in emptying the water, to throw out the bath, baby and all. But a Spirit-filled Church—even "a Church filled with

¹ Moffatt, *op. cit.*, 28.

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new wine"—has the sanity and wisdom of the Spirit. "And Stephen said, Behold I see the heaven opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God." In every change and separation the Church held fast by God and Christ. With that vision we can go far, for it is the ultimate and essence of Religion ; without it the Church, even in its most earnest adventure, is like an unarmed man going into the dark to meet a giant. But with the vision of a living Christ standing in the place of all power, whatever may be the difficulties and the darkness, the Church must evermore yield to the Spirit of life that calls across the deep—

Secure that God
Will come in thunder from the stars to save her.

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CHAPTER VI

CORNELIUS, THE SEEKER

“Him that is on the way to Me, I will in nowise cast out.”

IN the episode of Stephen we have seen how Luke, in his ample and sympathetic account, appreciates the significance of this new reading of history. There is a like feeling for the turning points of the faith in the story of Cornelius, which forms a watershed in the progress of the Church. From it the streams of Gentile and Judaistic Christianity flow right and left; one to lose itself in the barren sands of the second-century heresy, while the former emerges as the river which vitalises all the Christian ages.

From Jerusalem, with its stifling atmosphere of reaction, the scene changes to Cæsarea on the sea, the civil and military capital of the province. This city was the home, or the headquarters of Philip the Evangelist, and afterwards, for two fruitful years, the prison of St. Paul. It is generally accepted that here Luke gathered much of the extra matter in his gospel to supplement the earlier accounts of Mark and Q. Probably he found there also the floating traditions of the primitive days of the Church.

In Cæsarea there was accomplished the pilgrimage of an inquiring spirit. The story of Cornelius,¹ with

¹ The interesting suggestion has been made that the Centurion (of Q) and this man are identical. A change of military station is not unlikely. Q=early source behind the gospels of Matthew and Luke.

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its wealth of detail in the Hebrew-like iteration of the narrative, suggests just such an eye-witness as Philip, who may have been behind the scenes as "the schoolmaster" to bring Cornelius far on his way to the Christian faith. The almost "telepathic" experiences are told in three impressive movements—the preparation of Cornelius, the preparation of Peter, and the meeting of these influences, when the Roman soldier became, not almost, but altogether a Christian.

Cornelius was a centurion of the Italian cohort which, almost certainly, was recruited, and that voluntarily, in Italy, to serve in the province.¹ For a considerable time he had been resident in Cæsarea, for a home and a well-established record of piety say as much. His relation to the Jewish faith was that of a *proselyte of the Gate*; he was one of the many whom Judaism was attracting by its doctrine of God and its lofty ethic, but who had not yet taken the final step of uniting himself to Israel by circumcision, that he might become a *proselyte of the Sanctuary or of Righteousness*. As a "God-fearer"—Luke's technical name for the class—he was on the fringe, in that state of mind described by Jesus in the words, "Him that is on the way to Me, I will in nowise cast out." Already he can be spoken of as "A religious man, who revered God with all his household, who was liberal in his alms to the (Jewish) people, and who constantly prayed to God" (*Acts* 10²). Like the soldiers of his class in the Gospels, he is not far from the Kingdom of God; indeed he might have sat for the portrait of the good centurion (*Luke* 7¹⁻⁹),

¹ Cf. *Century Bible*, "Acts," p. 231.

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whom our author delineates with so much appreciation. True, Cornelius was on the wrong side of the middle wall of partition, but in his case the wall had become thin. Luke, followed by Tertullian, thought of all such as men with "souls naturally Christian." The light that lighteth every man was feeling its way out to meet the incoming light, and though they were not yet free, they were struggling forward into the fuller manifestation of the Light that shineth more and more. In our day the study of comparative religion and the story of the Mission-field have lifted the veil spread over all nations, to show us multitudes of such inquirers, who are stretching out their hands to an undiscovered Christ.

In all this Luke's sympathy for the Gentile world is clearly apparent; it is one of the *motifs* of his history; out in the darkness, there are wistful souls, of whom Cornelius is the representative. He has not yet seen the Light of the World, but he looks out at eastern windows for the dawn which has healing in its wings. Judaism had brought him far, but its surest service had been to lift the horizons of life and inspire the hope, always implicit in the religion of Israel, of the Coming One before whom the half-shadows flee away. Such is the psychological moment—a crisis in the soul of the seeker: "And thus to be a seeker is to be of the best sect next to a finder; and such an one shall every faithful, humble seeker be at the end. Happy seeker, happy finder!"¹

When he was in such a case as this, at one of the hours of prayer, a vision came to Cornelius. And

¹ Oliver Cromwell to his daughter Bridget.

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thus Luke, "with his tendency to materialise the spiritual," speaks of an angel flashing upon the soldier's mental sight, and bringing a message of encouragement—"Your prayers and your alms have risen before God as a sacrifice to be remembered." In this far-shining picture our author stands apart from the hard view of the ancients, and also of some belated moderns, that the virtues of paganism or of the pre-Christian life are merely *splendid sins*. In Luke's charity of mind, not only does God give men credit for the state they have reached, but "The spirit of Christ was brooding over the chaos of heathen thought, which seemed at first, and still seems to many, to lie wholly in the power of the Evil One. . . . Justin Martyr, as a philosopher looking back on history, cannot help seeing that the Gentile world had not been entirely given over to the crafts and seductions of the demons who bewitched men with idolatry. . . . The divine reason which was incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth must have been working in the world in past ages, and giving light." ¹ Among the Religious Ideas of *Acts*, none is more comforting and enlightening, as we think on the burden of the dim and almost unintelligible world, than this vision of the Spirit of God brooding over the face of the deep in the soul of the Gentile people. Cornelius thus stood where the brook and river meet, and at this crisis, in the multitude of his thoughts within him, he received a divine inspiration to call in Peter as the leader of his faith.

For a considerable time ("many days," for Luke has no care for exact chronologies) the apostle had been in Joppa and its neighbourhood, thirty miles

¹ Gwatkin, *The Knowledge of God*, ii. 56, 87.

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from Cæsarea, and was well known in the religious circles of the capital. Probably Philip was the medium between the soldier and the apostle. Thus Divine and human agencies intermingle in the story as in life itself.

Cornelius sent two of his domestics under the escort of "a trusty orderly," who himself had religious sympathies, to find Peter and bring him to Cæsarea. The whole story is quick with life and palpitating with spiritual influences—"a deep below the deep, and a height beyond the height." It is one of the most telepathic records in a book that has many of them. An inquirer in Cæsarea, led on step by step and girded to unseen issues, and behind him, thirty miles away, another man who is needed by him; and between them the lines of communication are held by the Spirit of Truth who bends each to His will.

The heart of Cornelius had been cleansed, but Peter needed an almost greater cleansing from the perilous stuff of inveterate and native prejudice. In the later Judaism, in contrast to Prophetism, there had sprung up a ring fence by which Israel was secluded from the nations. Racial antipathies and a false patriotism regarded other peoples as common and unclean, while Jewish scorn was answered across the fence by a prouder and a deeper scorn on the part of the Gentiles. Thus the ancient world was cracked lengthwise and across; and in Judæa the God of all the earth had become only the God of the Jews. But this human exaggeration of separatism, though it had its necessary uses, was not the Divine will, and had, perhaps, not even the sanction of the written Law;

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it came, as Jesus said about other things, from the hard hearts—

Which magnify His strictness
With a zeal He will not own.

In the same strain Browning describes narrow religionists—

Who, in a trick of exclusiveness,
And taking God's word under wise protection,
Correct its tendency to diffusiveness,
And bid one reach it over hot ploughshares.

From all this Peter had to be cleansed, and the work was done by "an *ecstasy* which fell upon him." The word, which is associated with certain stages of Hebrew prophecy, has been thus defined: "The spirit of ecstasy, the impulse that is above reason, that lifts man beyond himself, gives him power and blessedness, and lets loose the immortal soul from the trammels of the body."¹ With this one may compare the experience of Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

In the ecstatic condition or trance, Peter saw a sheet let down from heaven holding a heterogeneous collection of clean and unclean animals—a genuine Jewish picture of the world as they saw it. In a further revelation he was taught (shall we say reminded?) that there is no taboo in God's world. Why did not Peter remember the words of Jesus so applicable in this case? "Give for alms (or, perhaps, *cleanse*²) those things which are within,

¹ Gilbert Murray, *Lit. of Ancient Greece*, p. 64.

² The Aramaic word means "cleanse"; cf. the note in Moffatt's version (Luke 11⁴¹), Better, "cleanse what is within." A self-attested saying!

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and, behold, all things are clean unto you" (Luke 11⁴¹). Again (Mark 7¹⁹) our Lord, in defining defilement, swept aside all merely Jewish restrictions—"this, He said, making all meats clean"; which is probably a phrase of Peter's own, reminiscent of the incident described here.

While Peter was being prepared to receive them, the messengers of Cornelius were already knocking at his door. A world that believes in psychic phenomena should put this into its book! Forecasting the importance of the occasion, the Apostle took witnesses with him and so came to Cæsarea. There the two men, who had been led so variously along the ways of the Spirit, opened their hearts to one another in a soul-fellowship from which prejudices fell away. In the intimacy of Luke's style even the process of the thaw is appreciated. At first the stiffness and formality of Peter are apparent enough in the words, "Ye yourselves know how it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to join or accost anyone," he is going to say "who is unclean"; but he avoids the difficulty, in the neutral phrase "that is of another nation." Then the ice breaks—"God has shown me that I must not call any man common or unclean." In a leisurely and spacious manner, that may be the reflection of an Aramaic setting, the two men tell the story of their preparation, at the close of which Peter makes the great renunciation of his prejudice, and the cordial acceptance of the called of God in those timeless words, "I see quite plainly that God has no favourites, but that he who reverences Him and lives a good life in any nation is welcomed by Him." And forthwith the disciple is back

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again with his Master in the free air of the Galilean hills, telling the story of the Christ "who went about doing good and healing all who were harassed by the devil."

While Peter spoke, the Holy Spirit fell on all them which heard the word—a second and a *Gentile* Pentecost, whereas the first had been Jewish. The wind bloweth where it listeth and we cannot tell how far it has come or how far it will carry us. Here it carried Cornelius over the threshold on which he was lingering, and into the household of God. In his case the word of Jesus was fulfilled, that the secret drawing of the heart by God was indeed the inward promise that he should not be cast out. As at the first Pentecost, "the spirit of ecstasy that lifts man beyond himself and gives him power and blessedness" filled the heart and the house of the soldier. Baptism in the name of Christ followed, the one and solitary instance in the New Testament where the gift of the Spirit precedes the sacrament. The substance was there: concerning the form there could be no dispute.

It is not necessary to follow Peter's defence which he gave to the brethren who challenged him at Jerusalem. In substance it was this: "The Spirit bade me go, making no distinction, and who was I that I could withstand God?" He had not chosen the path: Another had. "The way is the way and there's an end on't." Concerning such ventures of faith and guidance one recalls Sir George Adam Smith's study of the character of Joshua: "In the great causes of God upon the earth, the leaders, however supreme and solitary they seem, are themselves led. There is a rock

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higher than they ; their shoulders, however broad, have not to bear alone the awful burden of responsibility.”¹ May we not apply the words ? Nowhere in the New Testament is this leadership more evident than here when the new Israel—the *third race*—goes out in the name of Jesus to conquer a still greater heritage. It may be true that Peter builded better than he knew. Do not all great men the same ? And the Church also, when in an ecstasy of faith she sees far off in the darkness the multitudes of all nations, not as common and unclean, but as souls who are the purchase of Christ’s pain, and a people for His possession ?

The brethren at Jerusalem acquiesced in a decision the breadth of which they but dimly understood—a decision which afterwards they challenged, till the battle had to be fought out to the end, so that a religion might emerge which was not a reformed Judaism, but a world-faith. Yet here in the making of Cornelius, the principle, so fruitful in expansion, has been established: “Then to the Gentiles also hath God granted repentance unto life.”

This dissension in primitive Christianity has, it may be, no living interest for us, except in its modern applications. There, indeed, its significance goes to the root of the most vital problems of the time. To these we shall now turn.

There are taboos in modern life, as well as in Jerusalem of old, and their native tendency is to thwart the Kingdom of God. Behind ring fences and middle walls of partition men gather to despise God’s image on the face of His creatures. East

¹ *Hastings’ Bible Dictionary*, ii. 788.

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and west, troubles come upon us because we regard peoples *and people* "as common and unclean." In the twentieth century this grotesque Jewish figure of the world as a sheet, with its motley collection of clean and unclean beasts, represents for multitudes their mental picture—their world-view. It spoils our politics and our evangelism too, for fraternity and the gospel come with no acceptance except from lips that have learned the message—"One is your Father, and ye are all brethren."

Christianity won the world with its tale of love—Divine and human. There are no pariahs nor outcasts, nor yet elect nations, in the mind of Christ! "God has no favourites, but in every nation he that reverenceth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of Him." They are justified not for what they are, but for what they are becoming. Of each of them the all-Father says, "I thought how I would set thee among the children."¹

It should not need to be said, however, that Peter's great word does not mean that one religion is as good as another. This is a perversity of which no one, who knows the facts, can be guilty. The Apostle himself had a sufficient ground in history for believing in the uniqueness of the religion of Israel, for its monument was so visible that one had only to look around. But he *does* plead that the difference between men and between nations, as *subjects* of religion, is negligible. His own faith, that of the Old Testament in its most spiritual parts, had taught him this, though the later Judaism ignored it.

Neither does all this imply that it is only the

¹ Jer. 3¹⁹.

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privileged nations and classes who indulge in the taboo. A friend of the writer told how, as a doctor in the Benares hospital, she had made some food for a patient, which was scornfully flung out of the window as defiled by her touch. "There is as much human nature in some people as in other people," and perhaps there may be a grain of truth in the remark that to-day it is *the publican* who goes up to the temple to thank God that he is not as other men are. Yet this is the work with which all Christian nations, people, and churches are confronted—to banish the taboo from human intercourse, and to say with Peter, "God hath shown me that I must not call any man common or unclean" (neither at home nor abroad).

But the story of Cornelius is not exhausted till it has led us up to the most modern of the questions that exercise the Church of to-day—What is a Christian, and what are the conditions of church-membership? In the best sense of the word the Roman soldier may be called a *Broad-churchman* of the finest type, "a religious man who revered God with all his household, who was liberal in his alms to the people, and who constantly prayed to God." "I see quite plainly that God has no favourites, but that he who reverences Him and lives a good life in any nation is welcomed by Him;" he was acceptable and accepted, and Peter asks the question, "Can anyone refuse water for the baptism of these people—people who have received the holy Spirit just as we ourselves have?" And he ordered them to be baptised in the name of Christ. No one desires to ask how little it takes to be a Christian, nor to lay down some irreducible mini-

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mum. But is the Church warranted, is it wise, to impose what is not a confession of faith, but a confession of dogmatic theology,¹ on candidates for church-membership? Certain churches impose a creed from without, Christological and even ecclesiastical, as the condition upon which young people shall be enrolled in the Church's army to fight the battles of the Lord. Tender consciences are debarred, and unrealities are multiplied in those who assent. Temporary opinions and passing *moods of faith* are elevated into first principles, and many men who would be a strength to the Church are left outside, to its detriment, and to their own loss of religious fellowship and comfort. Is it strange that in their revolt good men are saying; "I prefer for the expounder of the laws of the feast, the feast's own Founder"?

John Wesley is not likely to be accused of indifference to the faith of a Christian, yet he says: "As to all opinions which do not strike at the root of Christianity, we think and let think." "Orthodoxy, or right opinions, is at least but a very slender part of religion, if it can be allowed to be any part of it at all."²

Dr. Denney, who had no bias against dogmatic theology, says: "It is faith which makes a Christian; and when the Christian's attitude of the soul to Christ is found, it must be free to raise its own problems, and to work out its own solutions. This is the point at which 'broad' churchism is in the right against an evangelical Christianity which has not learned to distinguish between its faith—in

¹ Denney, *Jesus and the Gospel*, p. 388.

² *The Character of a Methodist*.

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which it is unassailable—and inherited forms of doctrine which have been unreflectingly identified with it. We are bound to Christ, and would see all men bound, but we must leave it to Christ to establish His ascendancy over men in His own way.”

Credal matter has a very small place in *Acts*. The primitive Church sought in her members loyalty to Christ, passionate and life-long, but it sought nothing more. For the rest it trusted to Christ Himself to work, through His Spirit, the fruits of faith. We may teach as much theology in our churches as men can accept, but let us receive them first. They will learn much better inside than outside. We shall find in later pages how well Luke knows the Greatest Question in religion. Here in Cornelius he has found the great essential. When Dante climbed the Mountain of Purification, he saw at the gate a shining angel with the keys, who said to him—

Peter set me here : from him I learn
Rather to err in opening than in keeping shut.

LITERATURE

The Knowledge of God, II., Gwatkin.
Jesus and the Gospel, p. 386, Denney.

CHAPTER VII

THE CONTACT OF CHRISTIANITY WITH OCCULTISM

“At least no merchant traffics in my heart.”

IN the light of previous chapters one might think that the greatest rival of Christianity was Judaism. But this is not so. Only for a little time did the Jewish religion trouble the Church as a serious competitor: the danger-point was passed and the controversy between them was fought out to victory in Paul's lifetime. Besides, though Judaism had its attractive appeal to inquiring spirits, it was gravely handicapped by its law and ceremonial, notably by circumcision; and in the Empire, by the hate and scorn felt for the Jews. These are very apparent in Latin literature of the Silver Age. The Jewish War and the destruction of Jerusalem left the old religion discredited in the Roman Empire; and the Apostolic Age had yet years to run when Judaism ceased to be formidable as a system in competition with Christianity. Among the multitude, the real rivals of the Church were Magic and the Mystery Religions. We shall have to discuss the latter in a subsequent chapter, but, here, we must inquire how the former came into contact with Christianity.

The ancients had two methods of dealing with the heavenly powers—"angels, principalities, spirits of the Height or of the Depth," as Paul calls them.

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The first was to *propitiate* them so as to keep on the right side, and win their favour, or their pity. But in default of, or in addition to, this, there was the other way—to *compel them*, by the utterance of a name, and mystic charm, or the use of some *hocus-pocus*, so that the spirits came under the power of chosen men, and could be invoked and induced, perhaps unconsciously, to fetch and carry in the service of those who had the “open sesame” to doors great and small. This was Magic or the most popular side of it—“to outwit or wheedle the unseen powers, or to compel them by the terror of some power supposed to be greater than theirs. We are not trusting them: we believe only that they will do what we make them do.”¹

Propitiation and Magic were not the successors of one another in the evolution. In the decadence of religions both flowed in, but the greater of these was Magic, which is the parasite that grows on the soil of decaying systems. Traces of it are found from time immemorial—in Egypt and in Babylon,² in the Old Testament through many incidents and frequent acts of counter-legislation, and also in the New Testament.

Oh, the road to En-dor is the oldest road
And the craziest road of all;
Straight it runs to the Witch's abode
As it did in the days of Saul.
And nothing is changed of the sorrows in store
For such as go down on the road to En-dor.³

¹ Gwatkin, *op. cit.*, i. 249.

² “Chaldean,” *e.g.* ceased being a place-name, and became the accepted designation of a magician.

³ Kipling, *The Road to Endor*, quoted by E. H. Jones.

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Alexander the Great to a certain extent Hellenised Western Asia by the civilisation and culture that followed in the wake of his armies. But his conquests had a further and disturbing effect; they broke up the "rookeries" of magicians, soothsayers, and dealers in the occult that clustered round the temples; dispersed them and sent them strolling over Asia Minor, and to the Greek and Roman cities. Students will remember how frequently *magus*, a magician, appears in the pages of the classics, and what a plague-spot sorcery became in all the cities of the Empire from 200 B.C. onwards. It is not necessary to condemn out and out these workers in magic; many of them were undoubtedly sincere, and, far in advance of their time, had obtained some inkling of the secrets of nature as now revealed by modern science; hypnotism, and the power of suggestion were undoubtedly known to them. Some of these *magi* were self-deceived, but the rank and file were deceivers, trading by their knowledge and for the most sordid reasons on the weaknesses, fears, and superstitions of their fellows. They were thoroughly unwholesome, in the sense that they broke down the personality of their devotees, made them means and not ends, and set themselves to dominate the will of their subjects, the most ruinous of all vices.¹ Why the Old Testament resisted this system of sorcery and necromancy, and put it down by the severest civil penalties as a danger to the Religion of the "good and right way," needs no telling. Probably the prophets and legislators of Israel knew their own

¹ For the whole subject, cf. Legge, *Forerunners and Rivals of Christianity*, Cambridge University Press, 1915, i. 90 ff.

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business better than those who assail them with whirling words; the primitive Christian Church had similar good reasons for refusing to come to terms with the cult of the soothsayers.

For, in magic, all that the magician needed was the knowledge of the charms, and dexterity in the manipulation of them. He might be a man of spirituality and character, or he might not. Yet, if he had the appliances of his craft, if he could weave spells, the higher qualities did not matter. Knowledge and not character was the one thing needful. The Church, as seen in *Acts*, fought all this in its cruder manifestations and, afterwards, in some of the more elaborate and extreme Gnostic systems of the sub-apostolic age. It stood for *character* as the essential of a religion which rests upon conscience. Christians were ridiculed for this choice in many of the satires of the time, yet history, the secure judge of men and things, has justified them.

But there is more. Religion has been defined as "the feeling of dependence," its watchword *believe* is no mere intellectual assent to truths, which, one says, only a few men in a generation are qualified to deny, but the outgoing, the surrender of the personality in all its needs and hopes to the almightiness of a merciful Creator. Magic, every kind of occultism, is based on the assumption that the heavenly powers may be compelled to grant our requests if only the right spell be invoked. Gwatkin, who calls this "the *battery theory* of religion"—the more guns the better—to coerce the powers that be, quotes ¹ even a champion of magic and idol-worships in his protest against the grossness of his own

¹ *Op. cit.*, i. 250.

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system, "Prayer is not a means of inducing the gods to change the course of things, but their own good gift of communion with them, the blessing of the living gods upon their children" and sums up: "In magic we seek to impose our own will on those powers: in religion we are free, like children, to make known our needs to them, but we submit ourselves to their will."

Such, in barest outline, was the system by which Christianity was opposed in its appeal to the masses in the Greek and Roman cities, and among the native populations of Asia Minor. Luke's history, we have seen, is a propaganda, an *apologia*, and a challenge to the world of the first century, an exposition of the Religious Ideas in the Church's message. In pursuance of his purpose, he shows us in four representative pictures Christianity in contact with Occultism.

(a) Simon Magus. In the missionary programme of *Acts* we find the words, "Ye shall be my witnesses in Samaria." Jesus Himself, at a wayside well, announced to the Samaritans the deepest truths of a spiritual religion; and, finding there "fields white unto harvest," drew from Samaria's daughter, a confession that showed the currents running among her people. "I know that Messiah (which means Christ) is coming." Into this expectant land Philip came with *the Good News*.

But for generations Samaria had contained a mixed population both in race and religion, and with its "unethical spirit" was a fertile field, or hot-bed, for the culture of soothsayers and their art. Simon the magician is the representative of these, "who to the utter astonishment of the Samaritan nation made himself out to be a great

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person, declaring that he was that power of God which is known as the Great Power." Skilled in magic, he had dazzled the half-heathen population.

But "when the gods arrive, the half-gods go." The Gospel came, the name of Jesus triumphed, and the Samaritans found the Christ looked for by their fathers. Even Simon himself believed, was baptised and attached himself to Philip, and became an envious spectator of the mighty works done in the name of Jesus. The Magician was convinced that in the Evangelist he had met a medium whose powers and spells were mightier than his own. Judging from his experience that there was nothing money could not command and that even the gates of the unseen are opened with golden keys, he came to Peter and John, who had now arrived on the scene, with a proposal to purchase "the Power." But in amazement and indignation Peter answered: "Death to you and your money for dreaming that you could buy the free gift of God: I see you are a bitter poison and a limb of mischief." The phrase, "Thou art in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity" (A.V.) must be taken to refer to the mischievous effects of such a man and his system upon the Christian community and life of the time: it expresses the Church's abhorrence of occultism and all its works. Then, terror-stricken at the severe rebuke, the magician begged the prayers of the Apostles to save him from the threatened doom. The request is thoroughly in character, for, tied up in his magic, he felt himself in the presence of a medium of more power and influence with heaven than he. Luke closes the interview here, and Simon disappears, with his story

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only half-told, to reappear in the romances of the sub-Apostolic age. He has left his name also in the ecclesiastical sin of *simony* and in the grisly pages of Dante's *Inferno* (Canto 19):

O Simon Magus ! O ye wretched crew !
Who things of God to your own greed adulterate anew,
By lust of silver and of gold subdued.

In certain respects Simon is a Balaam who has wandered out of the Old Testament into the New. There were elements both of good and evil in him and his class. We know too little of this mixed character and divided self to pronounce a final verdict upon him. But the taint of money—the vice of his order—was his undoing. The Roman world rang with the avarice and infamies of the corruptible and corrupting magicians. Luke introduces the photographic portrait in vindication of the clean hands of the Church which scorned to trade on the superstitions and fears of men. We know the accusation was made against Christians in the several persecutions that they were dealers in magic and the black arts ; the historian means to say, No such crimes are committed by us, but we denounce them.

“ Simon's heart was not *straight*,”¹ a significant and expressive word both for ancient and modern manifestations of the craft. Luke repudiates those who would make merchandise of the sacred things of the soul. God is not a merchant but a king. He has gifts which, however, are not bought and sold : if a man only sincerely desire them they are his. How they are received Jesus told these same

¹ *Acts* 8²¹.

Samaritans, "If thou knewest the gift of God, thou wouldest ask and He would give." But in the first century the unclean taint of money was upon most things, magic and religion included, and much of the unwholesomeness of the Occultism of any age is found in the persistent feeling that it is a money-making business. To the healthy mind there is something particularly abhorrent in the sale of the secrets of the soul, and of time and eternity. Luke's story of Simon, therefore, is a skilful *apologia* for the faith which comes saying, "We seek not yours, but you"; which has behind it the words of the Master, "Freely ye have received, freely give"; and again, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Such things were not negligible in the character Christianity made for itself among the clash of religions in the Roman Empire.

It is not necessary to repeat, in the other examples, what *Acts* further records of the oppositions between Magic and Religion. Here, if anywhere, the words are to the point: *Crimine ab uno disce omnes*—"from a single charge, learn them all."

(b) *Bar-jesus* encountered Paul at the court of Sergius Paulus, the proconsul of Cyprus. *Elymas* is not a name but a title which may be rendered "the wise man."¹ The "sorcerer" belongs to the same type as the false prophets who at the court of Ahab enticed the king to go up to Ramoth-Gilead (1 Kings 22). This form of *Low Prophecy*, as it is called, meets us frequently in the Old Testament, and was prevalent in all the nations round Israel; reappearing in the eastern Religions, it became a serious danger in the Apostolic Age. *Elymas* is the

¹ 'alim, a wizard; cf. the Turkish word *ulema*, powerful.

representative of this, and of much ethnic prophecy in its baser forms. The Religion of Jesus resisted it root and branch, not only for its avarice, but because "Christianity was strongly opposed to its methods of dominating its votaries, and crushing their personality and individuality. Bar-jesus represented the strongest influence on the human will that existed in the Roman World, an influence which must destroy, or be destroyed by, Christianity if the latter tried to conquer the Empire."¹ Here was a conflict of religious ideas, and for the sake of it Luke introduces his second picture as a frontispiece to the missionary work of the Church. It is due to the intention of the narrative that the sorcerer is the principal figure. The proconsul, who is described as "a sensible man," was evidently impressed by the teaching of the delegates. The Western Text of *Acts* says, "He was listening with much pleasure to them." But, to Elymas, the situation became at once acute and dangerous. If the new religion prevailed, his occupation and a lucrative position, which every magician knew how to turn to account, would be gone. He, therefore, set himself "to sow tares among the wheat" and drag away an honest soul from the gathering light. A miracle which, says Ramsay, we ought rather to endeavour to understand than to deny, left "the wise man" beaten and discredited, and the proconsul, convinced, not by the miracle but by the teaching, became a believer. Thus for the second time Luke records the contact of Christianity with Occultism, and shows how the religion of Jesus, in its native tendency, delivers men from their bondage

¹ Ramsay, *St. Paul*, p. 79.

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to demons and spirits, and restores the personality and individuality usurped by an alien power. Christianity is freedom, the freedom of a man in Christ who redeems us from other masters to be subject to Himself alone. He is the Liberator of the soul, for "He cut away the angelic Rulers and Powers from us, exposing them to all the world and triumphing over them in the Cross."¹

(c) The scene with the fortune-teller at Philippi is another line in the picture of Occultism to make the impression deeper. The slave girl was a ventriloquist, and was supposed to speak under the influence of a spirit.² The priestess of the Delphic Oracle belonged to the same school, which sometimes made itself the mouthpiece of truth and honour, and sometimes of "childishness or crude immorality." The girl necessarily believed in her powers; though her mind was disordered, she immediately responded to the waves of moral influence set in movement by the faith of the preachers. Her confession, "These men are the slaves of the God the Highest, which announce to you the way of salvation," need not be taken in the full Christian meaning, for "God the Highest," "Saviours," and "Salvation" were catch-words in the religious vocabulary of the time. But the girl, ecstatic, enthusiastic, and insane, had nevertheless gleams of insight not uncommon in such natures, which she immediately proclaimed. The Apostle, probably on the principle "I fear the Greeks even when they bring gifts," and in anxiety lest his Gospel might be associated with the common cults of the day, resented her testimony.

¹ Col. 2¹⁵.

² *Python*—belonging to Apollo, the god of prophecy.

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In the exercise of a strong and healthy personality—the victory that overcomes the world and brings the sure healing of the mind—Paul cast out the alien spirit. At once the ventriloquist became useless to her owners and the fountain of profit was dried up at its source. Again we can see the influence of money—"the accursed greed of gold." The story finds its place in *Acts* for reasons we have already mentioned, and, in addition, because it is a telling object-lesson of the mission of Christianity to classes depressed and held in Satan's bondage. It *placards* also those who made unholy traffic in the souls and bodies of their thralls. All this had its own appeal as propaganda and defence of the faith. Of course there was a tumult in consequence, with many wild words. There always is.

(d) The encounter at Ephesus, the headquarters of Magic, where the strolling Jewish Exorcists were confounded, need not detain us. One sometimes feels that Luke, with a keen sense for the humour of a situation, thoroughly enjoys his story of the discomfiture of men who were calling up spirits they could not control. In answer to their invocation of the name of Jesus and of Paul, the evil spirit retorted, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but you, who are you?" And the man in whom the evil spirit resided leapt at them, overpowered them all, and belaboured them, till they rushed out of the house stripped and wounded. This came to the ears of all the inhabitants of Ephesus, Jews as well as Greeks. It is a story that could be told, in which ridicule lends its aid to truth. Nothing quite so good in its way meets us till we come to Apuleius of the second century, in his adventures of

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The Golden Ass. The hero is a certain Lucius, a dabbler in Magic, who by means of drugs wishes to transform himself into a bird. But by the evil mischance of taking the wrong mixture, he changes himself into an ass ! ¹

To sum up, Luke introduces these incidents, grouping them in their native situation, with purpose to show to an age spirit-ridden and unwholesome, the healthy-mindedness of Christianity, which is the religion of pure benevolence, of personality, and compassion. Perhaps we can hardly appreciate how people, groaning under the superstition of demons and spirit-worship, would hail the coming of Jesus, the Liberator, from whose love, neither spirits of the Height nor of the Depth shall be able to separate the souls of men. For ourselves, when many neurotic and grief-stricken people are looking wistfully along *the Road to Endor*, and "every hoary superstition is getting out its horns," Luke's story in its details is not without significance : "Now these things happened unto them by way of example : and they were written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the ages are come."

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¹ J. P. Struthers of Greenock says of the encounter at Ephesus : "Isn't that a wonderful piece of insight into the nature of devils ? Poor Paul, lashed, and beaten, and shipwrecked, but Satan afraid of him ! 'But who are ye ?'—that's the way he answers his own friends !"

CHAPTER VIII

THE WOMEN OF THE EARLY CHURCH

“ So as she stood
She spoke. God in her spoke and made her heard.”

“ Our Euripides, the human,
With his droppings of warm tears,
And his touches of things common
Till they rose to touch the spheres.”

WITH the change of a single word these lines adequately and sympathetically describe the humanity of Luke in his portraiture of women. He is indeed the most domestic of all the Evangelists, full of interest for family-feeling and family-life; the great apologist of the Christian home, and the preacher of a social gospel which not only saves the souls of men, but creates an environment in which the fruits of the new life may come to a golden maturity. “This day is salvation come to this house;” “Thou shalt be saved and thy house.” Luke scarcely ever describes a typical conversion without this significant addition.

We know, though we may not sufficiently appreciate, the wealth of that varied gallery of women-portraits which represents to us the place they had in the primitive Christian Society. In the Third Gospel, with all the delicate reserve that half conceals and half reveals the divine mystery, the Evangelist groups round Mary of Nazareth, “the dear dumb mother,” the story of the Infancy, with Elizabeth

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and Anna standing by ; there are the women who ministered to the Lord out of their substance ; we see in the light of the Gospel Mary Magdalene, Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, only once mentioned, in the day when the sunshine fell upon her ; Martha is here, the busy housewife with her temper ruffled by much serving, and, sitting at Jesus' feet, her sister Mary, " whose eyes are homes of silent prayer." One would give much to know more of that other woman and her story who one day, in the crowd round Jesus, lifted up her voice to Him, " Blessed is the womb that bare Thee, and the breasts which Thou didst suck." There may be something to be said for the suggestion that the words of our Lord about him whose " last state becometh worse than the first " touched the sore places of a woman's memory ; who knows but that, wounded by a son's ingratitude, she looked with a divine envy on Mary, " the blessed among women," and her spotless and undefiled Son ? Does not one's heart warm also to " the daughters of Jerusalem " who on *the sorrowful way* bewailed and lamented Him ? Not only in the genial air of Galilee, but in the bitter and bigoted South, women gathered round the Master. These examples, and there are others, speak of the Church's tender recollections of the women of the early dawn who gave Him of their tears for the travail of His soul, and were, according to Luke, the first evangelists of His resurrection.

In *Acts*, as Harnack points out,¹ Luke is greatly interested in converted women, and, not unlikely, he obtained much of his material for the earlier

¹ *Luke the Physician*, p. 155.

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portion of his history from the women circles in Cæsarea, and from Philip the Evangelist with his four "ecstatic" daughters. In the later book we find the same traits as in the former, and this unity of feeling is only one of the many evidences for unity of authorship. The varieties of character also, denoting catholicity of interest, are as apparent in the history as in the gospel. When we open *Acts* we pass at once under "a dome of many-coloured glass," indicating the differences of temperament and religious experience which Christianity at its best always produces. One can scarcely over-estimate the value of this in the endeavour to gain some adequate knowledge of that wonderful time when the dew lies fresh upon the religion of Jesus. It is a first century *Legend of Good Women*—mostly good, with the three notable exceptions: Sapphira, Drusilla, the wife of Felix, and Bernice, the sister of Herod Agrippa.

For the uses of memory, we may listen to the roll-call. In the prayers that prepared their hearts for Pentecost, the women, and Mary the Mother of Jesus, are associated with the Apostles and our Lord's brethren: Luke has always an eye on the poor and the helpless, and, partly for this, he tells us of the Hellenist widows who were neglected in the daily ministrations: he notes how men and *women* were haled to prison by the persecuting zeal of Saul of Tarsus: in his account of the conversion of the eunuch, Luke introduces the name of Candace, Queen of the Ethiopians; as he cannot refrain from naming each harbour on the coast-lands, so his fondness for the common life and for fulness of allusion are almost Herodotean: there is a whole

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biography in the story of Dorcas, the mother of work-parties, who first of Christian women used her needle in the service of the Church—"full of good works and alms-deeds that she had done": in the generation that had no special buildings for public worship, Mary the mother of John Mark gave her house for the meeting of the brethren; Luke knows the whole story down to the name of the lively maid-servant, Rhoda, who kept the door and recognised Peter's voice. In Pisidian Antioch there were devout women of honourable estate (proselytes) who, influenced by the chief men of the city, stirred up the persecuting tendencies of that volatile population; but there is an offset to these in another proselyte, Lydia, the business woman of far-away Thyatira, who, with her women friends, had their hearts opened in the prayer-meeting by the riverside at Philippi. In the same picture, heightening the effect by contrast, Luke has introduced the story of the girl-ventriloquist who was healed. Greek women of honourable estate at Berea are contrasted with their sisters of Antioch—"many of them believed." In *Acts* Athens is not "the far-shining, violet-crowned city of song," but the scene of Paul's frigid reception by the intellectuals of the Agora; yet in this self-sufficient and now provincial town a woman named Damaris was converted; probably she was one of the *Hetairai*, or, according to others, a singer in the choral processions, but "who except Luke would have cared to note the adhesion of this woman and even give her name?" In the early Church no woman occupied a more influential place than the far-travelled Priscilla, whose husband is but her shadow; she

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was the instructress of Apollos, that learned Jew of Alexandria, and in our own time, in spite of Origen's despairing conclusion that "God knows who wrote Hebrews," Harnack has advanced her name as a likely candidate for the authorship of that great Epistle. Paul said somewhat hard things against women, but at Tyre they and the children were among the convoy that escorted him to his ship; Luke the artist—this he was, whether a painter or not—gives the living and tender picture, "Kneeling down on the beach we prayed, and bade each other farewell; and we went on board the ship; but they returned home." The sketch is Greek in every line of it, both for its pathos and its unadorned beauty. On the Apostle's landing at Cæsarea, Philip and his "ecstatic" daughters tried to dissuade him from going up to Jerusalem, but he said, "What do ye, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus. And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done." The story, which makes the heart beat, is in Luke's intention to show how men *and women* shared in the intimacies of the gospel. The repetition of this roll-call of famous women may be excused for the sake of the cumulative impression it makes, to exhibit the place they held in the Church of the Apostles.

On the general question we may draw these inferences. Among the Hebrews of the earlier time women held a position of confidence and honour; in the patriarchal age they are found free and unfettered, taking their place beside men. Sarah, and afterwards Miriam and Deborah, are not *emanci-*

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pated women—they never were bound. But the Deuteronomic Legislation, and then Rabbinism, depressed their influence to such a degree that in the story of our Lord we find His disciples wondering “that He talked with a woman.” His gospel, however, as the Evangelists show, had in it from the first a charter of right and freedom for them all, and this attitude is reflected in the records of the Apostolic Age. Among the salutations appended to *Romans*, out of the twenty-six names mentioned, at least eight are names of women, and this testimony to their place in the Christian Society is of course not affected by any conclusion as to the destination of the appendix of the Roman letter.

Both Bartlet and Ramsay point to the free and influential position of women in Macedonia and also in Asia Minor, the holy land of early Christianity, and emphasise the contrast between these places and conservative Athens, where the Church was so slow in striking root; it is exactly the position reflected in *Acts*. The second part of that history does justice to the women who laboured in the gospel, and, reading between the lines, one may infer that they had their own beneficial sphere in the offices that belonged to their sex; in attendance upon the baptism of female converts, in the visitation of the sick and of prisoners, and in their peculiar province of hospitality. But besides these more distinctively feminine duties, in virtue of charismatic gifts and in the freedom of the Spirit, they were accustomed to take part in the unpremeditated prayers of the Christian gatherings. In confirmation of this semi-ecclesiastical liberty, Ramsay recalls an interesting parallel that, in Smyrna, even in a

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Jewish community, a woman was actually elected as ruler of the local synagogue.¹ Outside *Acts*, in the sub-apostolic age women held distinct office, as "the order of widows" (an ecclesiastical title) and that of deaconesses imply. In secular affairs we find women at Rome appearing as authoresses, students, and critics in the public lectures of the literary and religious life of the time. All of which may lead to the inference that the picture of the subjection of women at this period may have been overdrawn.

But, confessedly, considerable difficulty has been found in making an adjustment between these facts and inferences and certain parts of the New Testament. There may be something, but not nearly so much as Weizsäcker implies,² in the contention that Paul was deflected, at least in opinion, by the narrow ideas of later Judaism on this as on other subjects. But M'Fadyen's observation³ is more to the point, that, though the Apostle's arguments on the woman-question are unconvincing, his conclusions are right. Like many other *ad hoc* pronouncements, they are right for the time and the place. His great principle stands, "There is no room for male and female, you are all one in Christ Jesus." But the difficulty emerges in the application of the principle. In Corinth, as in other places—but Corinth was especially guilty,—immorality was bound up in the religion of the city, and the emancipated woman was largely of the type of those who had lost their crown. The Church had a ceaseless battle to fight for purity of life, and the limitation of personal

¹ *The Church in the Roman Empire*, p. 68.

² *The Apostolic Age*, ii. 385.

³ *The Epistles to the Corinthians*, p. 155.

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liberty was nothing compared with victory. For Christian women to outrage the conventions of the time by appearing and taking their part with men in public life would have been a shattering blow to the reputation of the Church. Even in spite of all safeguards and restrictions, accusations of wrong and infamous conduct were scattered abroad by evil-minded people against Christianity as a system, and against Christians. We know how indignantly these charges were denied by pure-minded women, and the denial was confirmed by Pliny, the governor of Bithynia, in his rescript to the Emperor Trajan. But the purity of the Church and the high character of its women could be made plain to the world only by ceaseless vigilance, and by the limitation of its liberty for the sake of the distress of the times, "and for wrath's sake." That this *morale* was thoroughly maintained may be read in the envious admiration of pagan society—"what women these Christians have!" Much of what seems reactionary to us, in the Pauline and Pastoral Epistles, is due to obvious facts—the necessities of the age, the widely prevalent expectation that the *Parousia*, the second coming of Christ, was close at hand; the growing asceticism in some quarters may also have had a certain depressing influence on Christian liberty. These and similar reasons are responsible for what has been called the *emergency legislation* unfavourable to the rights of women. But the limitation stands, with the so-called Communism of the early Church, the attitude to meats offered to idols, and the question of the slave, as a temporary and positive regulation due to the practical necessities of the day.

That this, however, can be invoked as the working

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rule of entirely different social conditions and needs, even the most conservative will scarcely contend. Luther's caution that the New Testament was written for men with heads on their shoulders may well save us from such hopeless literalism. For this provisional legislation would to-day put a veto on the most beneficent and necessary services of Christianity, and destroy the heart of it to preserve the letter; it would forbid the work of women in the uplifting and cleansing of the standards of public life, in the amelioration of the social wrongs of civilisation, in the forward enterprise of missions, and in other paths of service, peculiarly their own, where they walk in the very footsteps of Jesus.

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CHAPTER IX

THE GREATEST QUESTION IN RELIGION : ITS ANSWER

“The moment which lets us through into eternity, our due.”

THE advent of Christianity into Europe is told in that crowded and glorious page where the gospel is seen at its congenial work of salvation. It is a theme dear to the heart of Luke. The story of Lydia, of the ventriloquist, and the jailer makes not only an unique chapter in the varieties of religious experience, but is an object-lesson in the broad comprehensive-ness of the Gospel and is in happy accord with the spirit of *Acts*. It might well have saved the Church from stereotyping both the form and the method of conversion, and, as we shall see, it has a significant social outlook into present-day life and work.

At first, however, the healing of the ventriloquist made manifest the old but ever new difficulty—that there are classes whose opposition to religion is not “honest doubt,” but the personal and mercenary consideration which always marks the muddled mind—Christianity interferes with business. In Philippi they resisted the gospel, “perceiving that the hope of their gains was gone”; later, in Ephesus, trade interests were adversely affected, and a riot followed, with the prologue stated bluntly and realistically by Demetrius, “Sirs, ye know that by this business we have our wealth . . . there is great danger that this our trade come into disrepute.” Still later,

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Pliny protests to the Emperor Trajan that the cattle trade of Bithynia is being ruined, because the temples are deserted and sacrifice has become obsolete. Modern examples of vested interests and their prejudices—*the idols of the market*—will suggest themselves to everyone.

In the tumult that followed the healing of the slave girl, Paul and Silas were brought before the magistrates, who by courtesy are called "Prætors." Through an excess of zeal, and, perhaps, confused with the uproar, these officials, in violation of Roman law, having scourged the preachers, handed them over to the jailer, probably the *governor* of the jail, who would be a considerable Roman official, "to be cast into the inner prison and their feet made fast in the stocks." Their courageous bearing, the hymns they sang at midnight, the listening prisoners and the providential earthquake are described in Luke's graphic story. But the central figure is the terrified jailer himself, in whose mind there has also been an earthquake shock, which threw into ruins his entire house of life.

The vigorous realism of the jailer's conduct all can feel. Saved from suicide¹ by Paul's energetic assurance, he brought his prisoners out into the light, and disclosed the distress of his soul in the piercing words, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus,² and thou shalt be saved and thy house." This has been well

¹ Philippi was notorious for great men who escaped from the storms of fate by the *back door*.

² "Christ" is not in the best MSS.—a sympathetic recognition that the Messianic title would have little meaning in Greek or Roman lands.

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called "that most important question of religion, and Peter also, as well as Paul, expresses the conviction that Christianity alone has a satisfactory answer to give."¹ If it be a singular service to the progress of truth to ask a great question, this merit belongs supremely to the jailer of Philippi.

We have seen that the first century was throbbing with these ultimate problems of life and death; "Saviour" and "Salvation" had become familiar words among the seekers after God, who were everywhere feeling after cleansing and light; Epicurus described the lecture-room which he opened as "a healing place for sick souls." The disease was known, and the heart of man pathetically called for the Physician. It is not, therefore, so impossible that the jailer should have had somewhere "in the dim consciousness that lies dormant in all men, the consciousness also of needing deliverance and healing." If he be thought of as a Roman officer, this is still more likely. Where did he get his glimmering of *salvation*? Was it in the air, or in conscience that stirs the depths of the soul as the tides plough the sea, or from the broken ejaculations of the ventriloquist?² There is often, both in science and in faith, a plurality of causes, and here this may well be the explanation. It has been asked, "Had there come upon him in that suicidal agony the sense of an inward misery and shame, a *horror of great darkness* from which he sought deliverance?" Principal Rainy used to tell the pathetic story of a man on the brink of suicide, who was saved for life by the dim echo of the opening words of the Creed

¹ Schmiedel, "Acts," *Encyc. Biblica*, 19.

² *Acts* 16¹⁷.

which he had repeated as a boy—"I believe in God, the Father Almighty." "*God the Father Almighty*," he cried, "surely such an One must have something to say to a man like me in an hour like this." Was the question an agony of pain "from that dumb region of the heart in which we dwell alone with our willingnesses and our unwillingnesses, our faith and our fears" ? ¹

In many quarters there has been a tendency to minimise the depth of the question by pronouncing it "psychologically impossible." Perhaps this word has been somewhat overworked in recent discussion ; it has been so here. If God and the soul have not become "a dead hypothesis" to us, the assurance of such happenings in the ways of the Spirit is the best of everything. "God and we have business with one another," and in a world like this, "spiritual forces have always the last word." Pascal's familiar sentence is in direct accord with the experience before us in this Scripture—"The heart has its reasons which reason does not know."

Every Christian worker can recall instances where, in states of exalted consciousness, men from whom little might have been expected spoke better than they knew. A Roman soldier could be swept by the tides which flow from the depths of God to the depths of man : "Deep calleth unto deep." We refuse to believe that the most important question of religion, even in its intense spiritual interpretation, is out of correspondence with the historical facts. It is, indeed, part of the realism, of the verisimilitude of the story ; and Luke quotes it, not for its individual application alone, but to remind the

¹ James, *The Will to Believe*, p. 62,

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world of the first century that the primitive Church made salvation the heart of its message, and that the Spirit knocked at the most unlikely doors. Round the Gospel there gathered both the helplessness of men's need and the victory of love divine.

But we must now come to the second part of Schmiedel's declaration that "Christianity alone has a satisfactory answer to give to that most important question of religion"—"What must I do to be saved?" We shall not forget, as our starting-point, that Paul's reply has the whole weight of the New Testament behind it: "Believe on the Lord Jesus and thou shalt be saved and thy house." The message does not stand alone; it is the burden of every apostolic preacher. Peter, as we have seen, has the same answer: "In none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved."¹ The modern poet unites in the harmony of the Apostles:

For God has other Words for other worlds,
But for this world the Word of God is Christ.

"The study of comparative religion, whether in the laboratory with the student at home, or in the field with the foreign missionary, will do nothing to disturb the primacy of Jesus."² In the sense of "another name" or of "Pagan Christs," there is no "Christ that is to be." To-day the supremacy of Jesus as the Master of those who live is so thoroughly recognised that scarcely anyone with first-hand and experimental knowledge of other

¹ *Acts* 4¹².

² J. H. Moulton, *Religions and Religion*.

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religions seriously proposes a substitute for Christianity; "the Light of Asia" is not a rival to "the Light of the World." And so we are left facing the dilemma of Jesus, "If I had not come . . . ?"

Stier's comment¹ is still worth garnering: "The answer of the Apostles is brief, simple, and precise, without any kind of circumlocution. Why is it that the preachers of Christ ever give any other? The Apostles do not question the awakened sinner for some time as to what he intends and understands by his inquiry; they immediately receive it in its *best* sense." Yet certain writers, one is sorry to see, speak of the evangelical interpretation as *perverted*: "Few places (in Scripture) have been more perverted. Did they (the Apostles) call on him in his then state to believe anything respecting the Church and the Sacraments of Christ? Unquestionably, for St. Paul would certainly not baptise a man who was totally ignorant of the grace of union with Christ which he would receive, and the obligations to serve Christ which he would come under by being baptised."² One may surely hesitate to believe that this is a credible inference from Luke's words or even from Apostolic practice. Should we not rather say, there are first things which must have the pre-eminence? Those other things—the Mystical Union, and the Grace of Sacraments—are also found in Christ; but must a man remain outside the door of Salvation till he be sufficiently instructed before he is allowed to enter? Surely the order is different: we do not wait for

¹ *The Words of the Apostles*, p. 277.

² Sadler, quoted in "The Acts of the Apostles," *Expositor's Bible*, ii. p. 290.

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the knowledge of these things before we commit ourselves to the Saviour, but we come to Him that we may know them. In religion, as in life, *solvitur ambulando* explains much; practice comes before theory. "He that willeth to do His will shall know of the doctrine."

Thou, O Christ, art all I want.

To believe in the Lord Jesus is not (primarily) an intellectual judgment at all, but an act of moral decision, of committal and reliance—the surrender of our personality to the influence of a Greater. *To trust* is the great demand of the gospel, nay, of life itself. We may take our definition of that elemental word *trust* from Professor William James—certainly no obscurantist in religion: "Our faculties of belief were not primarily given us to make orthodoxies and heresies withal; they were given us to live by. And to trust our religious demands means first of all to live in the light of them, and to act as if the invisible world which they suggest were real. It is a fact of human nature that men can live and die by the help of a sort of faith that goes without a single dogma or definition."¹

We receive men first and persuade them to commit themselves to the life which represents Christ: "To live so that He may approve of what they are doing." But we do not ask them to be perfect scholars before they enter the school. It is an axiom in religion that the great transaction of the will involved in committing one's self to the Christ-view of the world, "in burning the boats," and making no provision for the flesh, is so efficacious

¹ *The Will to Believe*, p. 56.

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and determinant that life begins *straightway* from a new centre: men who were blind, now see: old things pass away and all things become new. In the noble lines which conclude the *Purgatorio*, Dante describes the moment when "here beginneth the new life" in the experience which brought the cleansing and the springtide to his soul:

I from that stream that holy is and true
Returned refreshed, as tender flowerets are
Revived and freshened with a foliage new,
Pure and made meet to mount where shines each star.

If any man be in Christ there is a new creation. The prison of Philippi had become beautiful as the gate of heaven.

So great a thing it is to *believe*—"The noblest act of which the soul of man is capable." God honours men not only by trusting them, but by inviting their trust. Not the least valuable of the religious ideas in the Acts of the Apostles is the emphasis it places upon *believing*. We have seen ¹ that Luke delights in the records of prayer, of which he gives so many; one might also add that his studies in conversion make him the master of those who have the cure of souls; in his Gospel and in *The Acts* he has opened a clinic for all such.

Though conversion does not really need to be defended to those who have seen the light breaking through the darkness upon men who had been "dropping down the ladder rung by rung," yet testimony is not without its uses, for when good men praise the Lord, the humble hear thereof and are glad. Carlyle says: "Blame not the word,

¹ Page 42.

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rejoice rather that such a word, signifying such a thing, has come to light in our modern era, though hidden from the wisest Ancients. The Old World knew nothing of conversion; instead of an *Ecce Homo*, they had only some *Choice of Hercules*. It was a new attained progress in the moral development of man: hereby has the Highest come to the bosoms of the most limited.”¹ To this we may add the words of William James: “To be converted, to be regenerated, to receive grace, to experience religion, to gain an assurance, are so many phrases which denote the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self hitherto divided, and consciously wrong, inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right, superior and happy, in consequence of its superior hold upon religious realities. Carlyle’s *Teufelsdröckh* passes from the everlasting No to the everlasting Yea.”²

But many who do not cavil at conversion in itself, are seriously disturbed if anywhere it be described as *instantaneous*. Everyone recognises that, as the rustic said, “there are *reasons* for causes,” each event in mind and matter has its preparations and antecedents. We have spoken of these in the jailer’s experience, “without, our shame; within, our consciences.” But one bears in mind that, in numerous examples, if the turning movement do not come sudden and in a minute it will never come at all; by many an experience we have been taught that, admitting the preparatory discipline and girding before we knew whither we were being led, there comes “the moment of explosive intensity,”

¹ *Sartor*, chap. x.

² *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, pp. 189, 212.

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when all is fused and the work of months or of years comes quickly to decision.

So may the truth be flashed out by one blow
And Guido see, one instant, and be saved.

Speaking of sects of Protestantism that set no store by sudden conversion, William James says: "For Methodism, on the contrary, unless there have been a crisis of this sort, salvation is truly offered, not effectively received, and Christ's sacrifice so far forth is incomplete. Methodism here follows, if not the healthier-minded, yet on the whole the profounder spiritual instinct." Quoting illustrations of this, he continues: "These will suffice to show how real, how definite, and memorable an event a sudden conversion may be to him who has the experience. Theology has concluded that the Spirit of God is with us at these dramatic moments in a peculiarly miraculous way, unlike what happens at any other juncture of our life. At that moment, it believes, an absolutely new nature is breathed into us, and we become partakers of the very substance of the Deity."¹

But conversion—finding salvation—is not a simple bare event, standing stark and alone in a soul's history; it is always followed up by *the things that accompany salvation*. The door has been opened into the practical fruits of life; men who have once taken a stand for religion feel that they are identified with it, and though often falling away from their centre, they evermore return to it in that life of saintliness which is made up of ever new beginnings.

The jailer's conduct on that eventful night is a

¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 226-7.

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fine illustration of the method by which the early Church was enabled to reconcile Paul's doctrine of faith with the teaching of St. James on works: "We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone." Luke, with his passion for harmony and *togetherness*, gathers both into one in his representative picture of Conversion; the jailer "took them at that very hour of the night, and washed their stripes, and was baptised instantly, he and all his family; he took them up to his house, and put food before them, overjoyed like all his household at having believed in God." Such are "the things that accompany salvation."

The expression *and thy house* is one of Luke's favourite phrases and ruling ideas; salvation is not only an individual, but a corporate thing—a corporate salvation. The still-lingering patriarchal conception of the family as a bundle of life which must not be broken may be partly responsible for the recurring phrase, but only partly. For Luke is the most domestic of the Evangelists and most imbued with family feeling. How often the words *and thy house* are found both in his Gospel and in the history! He is the great defender of the Christian home, and here he reproduces the relative saying of Paul, who in this respect was like-minded with himself as a glad preacher of the social gospel.

Many marks of genuine religion find favour in our day, but nothing beats this and nothing can take its place—this corporate salvation—*thou shalt be saved and thy house*. The words, besides being a window into the religious individuality of Luke himself, are a picture of the primitive Church from the inside—an interior, which shows us Christianity

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at home, dwelling with itself in glad works of mercy, and shining like a light in the dim pagan world, where so often the home had lost both its sweetness and its sanctity. This picture of the religious ideals and the happy piety of the Christian community is a milestone far on the road to the conquest of the Empire.

It would not be amiss to make the Christian home one of the foundations, one of the verifications, of the truth of Christianity. When we find a religion that can do more for a man's house, we may talk "of another name." But what is the reading of history? In the first century it is *the Christian home*; in modern life, men look to that as a haven and an inner city of rest and refuge for the soul; and in the mission-field when the gospel comes, ere ever the jungles and the swamps are cleared, there rises *the Christian home* where the household, lifted from the blight of heathendom, gathers to show forth God's loving-kindness in the morning and His faithfulness every night. Christianity need not be ashamed, nor afraid to rest its case on this social gospel as the power of God to bless the homes of the people.

Flowers laugh before thee on their beds,
And fragrance in thy footing treads.

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CHAPTER X

JESUS IN THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH

“What think ye of Christ?”

PRIMITIVE Christians approached the problem of the Person of Christ neither by system-building nor by clearly-cut doctrinal statements. They lived the life and kept their eye on the object of their faith. In practical experience of what Jesus had been, and continued to be in the community of the Redeemed, the Church realised the Christ. Dr Moffatt¹ warns us against making the New Testament “a dogmatic quarry or an ecclesiastical draft or an ethical programme.” The caution applies in particular to *Acts*, which is not a theological treatise but a mirror of “the common life of the Christian Church.” As a general rule, the disciples did not coin new names for the increasing values they gave to the Master, but, using the definitions and predicates of the older faith, they filled them out with richer content and meaning; and even the names they employed were less definitions than illustrations of a Personality who was an Infinite and “above every name.” We cannot, therefore, be content with inquiring what was the meaning of *The Christ*, *The Son of Man*, etc., in the older revelation; the question rather is, What was the value of these titles to the Christians of the first generation?

At first all was plastic and indeterminate, for we

¹ *The Approach to the New Testament*, p. 144.

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should not import into the Christological ideas of the early Church the advanced conceptions of Paul, the master-builder of Christian doctrine. A reasoned and systematic view such as his could not be reached till believers had lived themselves into the new environment created by the Resurrection and Pentecost.

There is, however, no real contradiction between the Christological conceptions of *Acts* and those of the Pauline literature.

It is surely too much to say with some that Paul is the originator of the Church's Christology, who transformed the simple "Jesus" of the Synoptics into the transcendent Person of the great creeds. This has not been proved. More to the point is the judgment that "the difference between the Primitive Church and Paul was one of degree." He was higher up the hill, but the summit to be reached was the same. It could not have been otherwise, for had his doctrine concerning the Church's Lord been entirely new, a contrast and not a development, it is hard to see how he could have been accepted by early believers, as he certainly was, among the representative and accredited teachers of Christianity. Between them there were keen differences concerning Circumcision and the Law, but in other respects there was unity of belief. "They all held the elemental facts of life," though Paul saw these more intimately in their meaning and consequence and built them up into a system. "This growing apprehension of what Christ is for the inner life of believers, especially in their collective being, was the real or religious source of the development of Christology, the theory of the true nature of the historic Christ as experienced by faith. It

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takes various forms even in the New Testament, rising ever higher in range of significance. It loses more and more of local, national, temporal associations, as the Jesus of History, whose earthly ministry was in terms of Palestine under the Emperor Tiberius, grew upon believers of differing temperament and culture as "the Christ of Faith," directly related to the "eternal and universal being of God."¹

In the beginning the Creed of Christianity differed from that of Judaism only in its basal belief—*Jesus is the Christ*, the Messiah, and King of God's Kingdom. Almost immediately this was followed up by the affirmation—*Jesus is Lord*; the Church gave Him this predicate, using for it the word *Kurios* which in the Greek Bible represents the ineffable name—the **JEHOVAH** of the Hebrew scriptures. Later, they made the further confession, the *Christ is Jesus*: as Principal Denney puts it, "The Christ of Faith was the Jesus of History." Finally, the faith of the primitive Church declared itself in the words "Our Lord Jesus Christ," which became the complete confession of an early believer concerning Jesus of Nazareth.

In estimating the place that the Church of the first days gave to Jesus, we shall have to take into account also the various attributes given to Him, in as far as these indicate *the work and function* He fulfilled as both transcendent and immanent. Such is a brief statement of the problem we have now to investigate—Jesus as He was seen in the Faith and Worship of the people who were called Christians.

1. *Jesus is the Christ* was the first article in the Church's confession. In the front of the discussion we ought to recognise that though in the Pauline Epistles

¹ Peake's *Commentary on the Bible*, p. 642.

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Christ has become and is used as *a name*, in *Acts*, apart from certain credal formulæ, the predicate is *a title* and not a name. How this designation was arrived at we may trace in the early chapters of *Acts*.

We need scarcely recall how the Messianic Hope runs like a line of life through the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament. It was a great thing for any people to live in the expectation that the next child born into their world might be He who was beyond all failure and above all praise; a hope which became the Divine consolation of Israel for all her burden and defeat. It had, no doubt, its material side, and threatened, sometimes, to merge spiritual issues in a flamboyant nationalism, both narrow and forbidding. But in the higher ranges of Prophecy, especially in *The Songs of the Servant* of the second Isaiah, it rose into the sheer idealism of a spiritual leader for all nations, who was to be the Lord's Christ, not in a blaze of earthly glory, but in the form of a *Suffering Servant*.

Surely our ailments He bore

And our pains He took for His burden.

It was to this side of Messianic prophecy Jesus attached Himself, and accordingly offered His life as One who came "not to be served but to serve and give His life a ransom for many." Devout and spiritual men like the aged Simeon in the temple hailed Him as such, and spoke of the sword that was to pierce the suffering mother's heart that He might become "a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of Israel." But the Crucifixion overcast many hopes, and threw His disciples and followers into confusion and dismay: "We trusted that it had

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been He which should have redeemed Israel—but.” The word reveals the depths of their despair, and their foreboding that the appearance of Jesus might be only another of the false dawns which so often had mocked the hopes of the Hebrew people.

The first task of the disciples, therefore, was to interpret the Crucifixion, to come to terms with it, and rationalise it as one of the ways of God with man; though it was the Resurrection, the article of a standing or falling Church, that enabled them fully to justify to themselves all that had happened, and lifted their dejection into the light of a living hope. In the source from which Luke reports Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost we find the earliest Christology, both primitive and rudimentary; he preached Jesus as “a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders which God did by Him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves know.” This also is the position taken up by Nicodemus, “Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do the mighty works which thou doest, except God be with Him.” In the opening statement of *Acts* we see the Apostolic Church working at the problem of the Crucifixion: Jesus had died a shameful death, but He was approved of God, and a divinely-sent teacher—not a criminal, but a martyr. The Crucifixion, the great stumbling-block to Jewish faith, was explained; it was in God’s plan, in His determinate counsel and foreknowledge, for Isaiah had said of the Servant—

But Jehovah had purposed to bruise Him,
Had laid on Him sickness.

The historian of Greece¹ remarks on the victory

¹ J. H. Bury, *History of Greece*, i. 273.

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of Marathon, "The history of the world does not depend on proximate causes." The disciples at Pentecost had the same faith in the God of events, though, as Hebrews, they expressed the truth under their own forms and language.

His death, foretold in the Scriptures, was but for a moment, for Jesus had been raised from the dead because it was not possible that death should hold Him. For proof of this, Peter quotes the sixteenth Psalm.

Thou wilt not leave me in Sheol ;

Thou wilt not suffer Thy saint to see corruption.

The exegesis which applied this psalm to Jesus satisfied the minds of the time, for the early Christians saw Christ everywhere in the Old Testament because they saw Him everywhere in their own life. Their sun-filled eyes beheld the reflection of the great Sun of Glory wherever they looked—in the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms ; in their sense, as in ours, Christ is the Light of all Scripture—the lamp by which we read it.

But Peter's second argument comes with more persuasion to the modern mind : "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses." These are remarkable words to be spoken in Jerusalem a few weeks after the Crucifixion, and the argument from them is practically as strong as ever. No one now impugns the *honesty* of the witnesses. The attempt is made to get round their testimony by more or less fine-spun theories, yet the *testimony itself* stands as a fact in the case—"We all are witnesses."

But the disciple proceeds to an even stronger argument : "Being exalted to the right hand of the Father, Jesus hath shed forth this which ye now

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see and hear." The ultimate Apologetic is the continuous activity of the Christ—what Jesus does now for men: He is the Christ of Yesterday, and He is the Christ of Forever, but He is also the Christ of To-day. The Church is built on the Resurrection. Had it not been for that glorious rising from the dead it could never have got a beginning. What power except this fact could have transformed the timid band of followers, who had fled in dismay from the awful Cross, into the spiritual leaders of the world? To the Resurrection Luke ascribes the rise of the Church, and such a Church! with its moral dynamic of Spirit, that uplift of life which we have seen in the vital religious ideas of the *Acts of the Apostles*. Peter's sermon at Pentecost is invaluable, therefore, as the first step in Christology; it is also the earliest Christian apology, and the staple of all succeeding arguments for the Resurrection.

We must not, however, read into these early experiences any fixed Christological definitions. Life in its beginning does not theorise. Some have seen in these chapters of *Acts* Adoptianism, *i.e.* Jesus was adopted and declared to be the Son of God, and such like views. But this is beside the point, for the discourses of Peter say nothing concerning the *nature* of Christ; they declare only what He has done, and continues to do among men.¹ They call Him, *The Servant*—an implicit testimony to Luke's knowledge of the Greek Bible, and a special feature of these chapters; they speak of Him as the *Holy and Righteous One*; and that shining title, the *Prince of Life*, crowns their testimony. In the light of these predicates it is surely something

¹ Cf. *The Person of Christ*, Mackintosh, p. 42.

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of a perversity of thought to affirm that to early believers Jesus was simply another man: "The gospel from the beginning was not at all that Jesus most perfectly represented our common nature or illustrated our human life, but that He brought with Him something into our nature and life which was not there before, and raised them into something which was not themselves, or their own, and to which they could attain, only in and through Him."¹ This is the Gospel of the Resurrection, and through it the Church attained its first creed: *Jesus is the Christ*.

In the light of Easter Day the Church looked up and beheld its Christ. Even in His earthly ministry He had been this; though, if we are to put first things first, the filial consciousness, His relation to the Father, came before all: we cannot fix a time when sonship was not present to His mind. But if He was Son and Messiah in the days of His flesh, now by the Resurrection He has been openly manifested as such. The coronation did not make our sovereign a king; he was crowned because he was a king. The Resurrection *proclaimed* Jesus as the Christ of God.

But the sermon of Pentecost, like all good sermons, concluded with an application, "Repent ye, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Christ." The sermon had for its goal—*Jesus is the Christ*: the acknowledgment of this is made the condition of entrance into the Church. Thus we see that much of the credal matter in the early chapters of *Acts* represents baptismal formulæ by which men made the great acceptance and committed themselves to the

¹ *The Gospel in the Gospels*, Du Bose, p. 6.

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Life. *Jesus is Christ* represents the earliest of these, and, naturally, was used in Jewish-Christian circles where the Messianic Hope was understood and valued.¹

2. *Jesus is Lord*.—When the Christian Mission developed on Gentile soil, *Jesus is Lord* became the usual formula or confession of the Church's faith. This is the favourite predicate in the Epistles, outside of which, except in nominatives of address and in certain confessional statements, it hardly occurs at all; but it appears twelve times in the *Acts* and is used by Luke, even in his report from the primitive source, in speeches where the Hebrew title might rather have been expected.

Keen theological interest has lately been manifested concerning *Lord*, whether the name sprang up first on Palestinian soil, or in Greek lands, where it would be more intelligible. In favour of the former view there is Peter's sermon (*Acts* 2), in which he applied the 110th Psalm to Jesus—

The Lord said unto my Lord, sit Thou on my right hand.

This Psalm became one of the great proof passages in the Apologetic of the Early Church, and the usage shows the weight they laid upon it, all the more that Jesus Himself had adopted the words in His controversy with the Pharisees (*Luke* 20⁴¹). Reference has already been made to the Septuagint's uniform translation of the sacred name *Jehovah* by *Lord*. In view of this Dr H. A. A. Kennedy² claims a Palestine origin for the title, and quotes the closing paragraph of 1 Corinthians with its

¹ Cf. *The Theology of the New Testament*, Stevens (International Theol. Library), p. 265 ff.

² *Vital Forces of the Early Church*, p. 109.

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Aramaic rendering *Maran atha*, "Our Lord is coming," as "the reminiscence of a favourite phrase in Palestinian Church worship, which of course was carried on in Aramaic. The allusion reminds us that the words formed an integral part of the life of the earliest type of Jewish Christianity." Dr Moffatt¹ favours a similar opinion, and finds in the Messianic quotations in *Acts* a general consent that Christians went to the Old Testament, which represented their highest hopes and ideals, and not to any external source, and found, by comparison, that prophecy and fulfilment had met in Jesus. "The proof from the Old Testament was what finally legitimised Jesus in the eyes of the Jews."

Others claiming that the Mystery Religions and Christianity acted and reacted on one another to quite a considerable degree, naturally seek the origin of *Lord* in this quarter. The divinities adored in these cults were called *Kurioi*, lords, in contradistinction to the *Theoi*, the old classical gods, who, in the first century had been relegated, by the better minds at least, to the obscurity of a somewhat discredited Pantheon. "Jesus as adored by the community, and as the supreme object of worship, is *Lord*." With this we may compare Paul's words, "So-called gods there may be in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are plenty of them both gods and lords, but for us—

There is one God the Father from whom all comes,
And for whom we exist ; One Lord, Jesus Christ,
By whom all exists and by whom we exist."

I Corinthians 8⁵⁻⁶.

¹ *The Approach to the New Testament*, p. 94 ff.

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In the present state of the question, perhaps, no final answer can be given as to the origin of the title. Both views may have their elements of truth if we make them complementary, and not mutually exclusive. They were not affirmed by two different groups; both were used, here and there, to express the faith of the Church. Apart from the discussion of origin, the main point, however, is quite clear; whether in Palestine or in Asia Minor, *Lord* predicated divinity, the person so-called and adored is within the ranks of the Godhead. "His possession of this name *Kurios* placed Him side by side with God in the eyes of humanity."¹ He is not simply another man, but unique both in His Person and Mission. In the mouth of Jewish monotheists the predicate is abundantly revealing; for they refused to give it to anyone besides, not even to the Emperor when their lives were at stake; it was kept sacred for Him "to whom every knee shall bow in heaven, on earth, and underneath the earth, and every tongue confess that *Jesus Christ is Lord*."

The proof of the uniqueness of Jesus, however, is to be found not merely in isolated texts, names, or quotations, but in the general consent of believers as to His *function and work*. In their theology of experience they did not speculate concerning His *nature* or use abstract terms, but they were very sure and explicit about what He was to them, in what He had done and would do for all men as King of their lives. Concerning this there is no dubiety or faltering in the estimate of the religious significance of Jesus; it is in the line of His *function*,

¹ Kennedy, *The Theology of the Epp.*, p 159.

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even more than in His names, that we find the Church's valuation of the Master.

They affirmed that He had been raised to God's right hand, from thence He had sent the Spirit—the Spirit of God, upon the waiting Church; “and the throne on which He has been set in His exaltation is the throne of God Himself.” All the prophets bear witness to Him: the Old Testament comes to its goal and purpose in Jesus. To Him strict monotheists offered prayer; in Athens Paul proclaimed that God has fixed a day on which He will judge the world justly by a man whom He has destined for this. And He has given proof of this to all by raising Him from the dead. For a Jew and a Pharisee to say that is striking evidence of the impression Jesus had made, and of the place He held in the faith of the Primitive Church.¹ They preached *Jesus* as the gospel of salvation, and in His death He was openly *placarded* before the Galatians as the sole object of their faith, the fountain of repentance and forgiveness. Such attributes are more than all proof texts; they are a mirror in which we see the Lord as the believers of the first age saw Him. Principal Denney² draws the conclusion, “It is clear that Jesus had in the earliest preaching and the earliest faith of Christians that solitary and incommunicable place which the Church assigns Him still. We may have any opinion we please about the rightness or wrongness of this, but we must admit that primitive Christianity gave Jesus in its faith the extraordinary place which has just been described.”

¹ Cf. *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, p. 379.

² *Jesus and the Gospel*, pp. 17, 20.

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3. *The Christ is Jesus*—"the Christ of the Church's faith is the Jesus of History." This further predicate is inevitable if we are to show how clearly and positively the early Church refused to submerge *the religion* in a mere circle of ideas. They did not overcome the world by a new philosophy, even though it were a philosophy of the Christ. For, as we are reminded, "Ideas are often poor ghosts, our sun-filled eyes cannot discern them, they pass athwart us in their vapour, and cannot make themselves felt. But sometimes they are made flesh, they breathe upon us with warm breath, they touch us with soft responsive hands, and speak to us in appealing tones; they are clothed in a living human soul, with all its conflicts, its faith and its love. Then their presence is a power, then they shake us like a passion, and we are drawn after them with gentle compulsion, as flame is drawn to flame."

From the beginning Christianity has been a historical religion. The theology did not create the facts but the facts the theology. A later age involved in the controversies concerning "the relation of Christ and God" may have been, naturally, inclined to dim Christ's humanity in the splendour of His divinity. But the Primitive Church made no such mistake. It was Jesus of Nazareth, seen in the flesh, who was the exalted Christ of their faith; and when, on the defection of Judas, they elected a disciple to fill the place left vacant in their ranks, it was to one "of these men which have companied with us all the time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us," that they turned for a witness.¹ It has been said that Paul

¹ *Acts* I²¹.

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regarded as immaterial, or at least secondary, the historical facts concerning Jesus of Nazareth, and his words are quoted, "Though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more."¹ But the knowledge that Paul disclaims is not a knowledge of Christ *in the flesh*, but *after* the flesh, and on this the whole argument turns: "Even though I once estimated Christ by what is external (his estimate of Him before His conversion, an estimate of Him after the flesh and not after the spirit), I no longer estimate him thus." Regarding the interpretation which makes Paul undervalue all knowledge of the historical Christ, as Matthew, Mark and Luke saw Him, Dr Denney² remarks, "It is a little difficult to take this seriously. No one ever knew Christ as He was *in the flesh*—the Christ of Matthew, Mark, and Luke—better than Paul . . . and there is no ultimate source for this knowledge but the historical Christ." In one of his letters³ the apostle recites the Gospel which he preached—a Pauline creed in miniature: "First and foremost, I passed on to you what I had myself received.

Christ died for our sins, as the Scriptures had said:
He was buried,
He rose on the third day,
He was seen of Cephas, then by the twelve,
He was seen by over five hundred brethren,
After that He was seen by James,
Then by all the Apostles,
And finally, he was seen by myself, as the one untimely born."

This is the summary of Apostolic preaching on

¹ 2 Cor. 5¹⁶. ² *Expositor's Bible*, 2 Cor., pp. 201 ff. ³ 1 Cor. 15³.

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which Paul and the Primitive Church were agreed ; he *received* it, not by revelation, or from the Lord, as he says concerning certain other truths, but from the *deposit* and the oral teaching which, years before the gospels were written, had been "the common property of the Church," and was the staple of Christian Evangelism. Can we really think that early believers worshipped the idea of a transcendent Christ whom they clothed with religious garments gathered here and there from the Jewish Scriptures and the cults of the first century? Not so did they learn Christ.

The Apostle's Creed can be used as further evidence of this. Though the Creed has no claim to be of direct Apostolic origin, and in its latest additions may not be earlier than A.D. 750, yet Harnack carries back its *original* form to the middle of the second century ; and it has been strongly held that "the substance of its teaching is primitive, and truly represents the facts upon which the teaching of Peter and Paul was based." And the Creed builds itself upon a central historical foundation concerning Jesus.

This brief and inadequate discussion will not be out of place if it has made clear that the religious ideas, which form the Apologetic of *Acts*, are in touch with facts of history which quicken the ideas into vitality. In view of the evidence from the New Testament the discussion might be regarded as almost superfluous, were it not for the impression, which in recent years has been revived, that Christianity, as the Religion of the Spirit, is independent of historical facts, and is burdened rather than blessed by them. "Do not ask," men say, concerning this or that event, "if it is a fact, the only question that counts is, did early Christianity

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believe that it was a fact ? it makes no difference, if only in one way or another we have received the spiritual impulse."

It matters little for the name
So the idea be left the same.

One recognises fully that the intention of all this is to serve the faith and to find some unassailable position by which truth shall not be made dependent on the contingent facts of history.¹ But it is a perilous venture to cut away the Christian Religion from its base. One asks, "Would spiritual religion suffice without a historical basis, and what would our evidence be for spiritual religion, if we had not the record of actual history to check fancy and support the ventures of faith ?" ²

The theory, as the above quotation infers, is suspect in that it ignores the influence of personality on all world-movements, ancient and modern. Behind every religion that has left its impress on the human spirit there are great personalities—Moses, Buddha, Zoroaster, Mohammed—and even the legendary elements in their history are evidences, by the shadows they cast, of the towering figures behind. Back of the Church there is confessedly an unique Personality before whom every knee has bowed, from whom there flow both power and light ; the religion was not founded on a book but on Him ; the men who evangelised the great cities of the Empire preached Jesus : He was their message, their Gospel ;

¹ This is the contention of Dr Dale in *The Living Christ and the Four Gospels*, though he is not of course to be identified with the Neo-Hegelian position. Cf. also *Sermons and Addresses*, Professor Flint, p. 307.

² *The Jesus of History*, Glover, p. 242.

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they were full of hope and hopeful of life in proportion as they drew near to Him, and in the recollections (the remembrances) of those who had companied with Him, they were lifted up and strengthened.

The Personality of Jesus is not only the inspiration but the touchstone of the Church, and whenever, in wandering mazes lost, the Christian Message becomes thin and out of touch with life, the return to Christ renews its youth, and restores its power over the hearts of men. It is as unreal to think that the Church can cut itself off from its sources in the Gospel History, as to say, with the rustic, that we do not need the sun to shine in the day-time, because it is light in any case. How could the Church have got a beginning, how can it be revived in the midst of the years, but for the actual story of Him who is the Life and the Light of men?

Great experiences have behind them, and live by contact with, an unique Personality. Fact and Faith must not be torn asunder. The Church renews its ancient rapture by a draught of the Water of Life from the fountain that was opened in His story, more potent than all philosophies to redeem the world and give us a future and a hope. Thus it still blesses men—

“Grace be unto you, and peace, from Him which is, which was, and which is to come.”

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CHAPTER XI

THE APOLOGETIC OF ACTS—I.

(a) JUDAISM. (b) NATURAL RELIGION.

“ I have other sheep, too, which are not of this fold ; them also I must bring.”

OUR task in this chapter is not to deal with the Apologetic of the New Testament, but to give a simple statement of the arguments and persuasions, on which, according to Luke, primitive Christian preachers based their claims for acceptance. These pages are not even a *résumé* of Pauline Apologetic, for that would be to traverse the whole field of the Literature ; besides, even Paul was but one of many preachers and fellow-labourers less eminent, who spread the Good News. The building of God rested on the *Apostles and Prophets* ¹ who each and all, by word and life, contributed to the making of the Christian Church.

Among the religious ideas of *Acts* the apologetic of the book has a primary intention, for the author has a sympathetic outlook to propaganda, and, by the selection of his material, he describes in various pictures how Christianity made its way in a world of men and religions. The narratives, with their relative speeches, reflect as in a mirror the methods of the missionaries and their strong reliances in pleading their cause. One side of this is doubtless

¹ The “ prophets,” here, are a New Testament order.

The Apologetic of Acts

represented in the Pauline correspondence which like the New Testament itself has a keen apologetic interest. But, on the other hand, the Epistles are specifically addressed to those inside the Church ; and are in some measure *ad hoc* writings dealing with questions and emergencies of local and temporal interest. To a certain degree, therefore, they lack the accent of popular appeal which is essential for carrying conviction to an undecided or resistant audience. Behind these documents there must have been something simpler and more on a level with the situation, whether of Jews or Gentiles, something that could be used *impromptu* on the floor of the synagogues and in the full market-place. What was this popular Apologetic ?

In our own day one appreciates the difference between an address in the open-air or camp and the more elaborate and literary composition, lecture, or sermon. The latter, serviceable for its purpose and audience, is often grotesquely inefficient in an alien psychological climate ; *padres* and preachers with the troops, seeing this, soon learned " to lighten the ship " of all superfluities in word or doctrine. There must have been a similar adaptation in the Mission which, starting from Antioch, earned Luke's encomium that the word of God grew and mightily prevailed.

For the uses of the modern Church, it is profitable, therefore, to ask what was this primitive solvent to which Jewish prejudice and Gentile paganism alike yielded ? On what persuasions did the missionaries chiefly rely for gaining a verdict and carrying conviction in the synagogue or the market-place ?

Indications are not wanting of a very efficient

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Apologetic by which the primitive preachers were schooled in the art of approaching their audience, and winning a hearing and an intelligent assent. It was needed; for contemporary history has much to say concerning the keen rivalry and conflict of religions in the first century. Christian missionaries, as a matter of course, were expected to give a reason for the faith that was in them, and so plead and defend their gospel; for they were daily face to face with opponents who had also a cause to defend. This continual discussion pervades *The Acts of the Apostles*, and reveals Christianity as a fighting faith—"a sign which is spoken against"—that triumphed, as one says, because, among other reasons, it both *outlived* and outargued the rival religions of the time. *Acts* is filled with this Apologetic.

The Apologia had to meet both (a) Jews and (b) Gentiles.

(a) In their synagogue ministry, nationality opened the door to the Apostles, who built on a foundation already laid in Judaism. They could count on a belief in God summed up in the theistic conceptions of the older faith, on moral standards, and, generally, on what Hebrew religion called "the good and the right way." Behind them there was also the unique religious literature of the Old Testament, which they used as an infallible book of proof-texts, acceptable and to be accepted. This also was in their favour, that the best minds in their audience had a disposition toward the truth, since they looked forward with wistfulness to the advent of a Deliverer who, in the fullest sense, would be "the Consolation of Israel."

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Accordingly, we find the Apostles preaching Jesus as the Christ who had been heralded by the Prophets and Psalmists. A vivid illustration of the contact of Christianity with Judaism has been preserved in the closing chapter of *Acts*; in Rome, the resident Jews received Paul in an attitude of frigid neutrality, an experience that must have been familiar by frequent repetition—"We think it only right to let you tell your own story; but as regards this sect, we are well aware that there are objections to it on all hands."¹ This appeal to Judaism has been discussed in a previous chapter, and it is not necessary to review it further.

On the fringe of the synagogue, but sometimes *far ben*, there were the Proselytes, the God-Fearers, and the Devout, who, unsatisfied with the religions of the land, had come to put their trust under the wings of the Lord God of Israel. These also, by sympathy and need, were open to the argument that in Jesus of Nazareth the long-silent heavens had at last spoken and the Christ had come.

(b) But inevitably the situation changed when the Mission was carried into the streets of the Provinces, there to make contact with an age-long inheritance of pagan thought and practice. To these also a way of approach had to be opened; the difference between them can be felt by a comparison of two types of address: (1) to a mixed audience of Jews and Proselytes in Jerusalem (*Acts* 2), or at Pisidian Antioch (*Acts* 13); and (2) such typical speeches as those at Lystra and Athens, or the defences before Felix and Festus, the Roman Governors. To this Gentile Apologetic may be added 1 Thessalonians,

¹ *Acts* 28¹⁷⁻²⁴.

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an authentic representation of primitive preaching, "simple and childlike, a kind of Christian primer." This continual discussion or appeal running right through the New Testament represents Christianity on its defence, and, through this, beating out into clearness its theological conceptions and social ethic.

Before we consider the Church's Apologetic on Greek and Roman soil, however, reference should be made to the background and religious atmosphere of the time. For paganism, no less than Judaism, had its heredity and tradition. The study of Comparative Religion and the researches of travelled historians have dispersed something of the moral gloom which once overhung the first century of our era. This exaggeration of disapproval, for such it may be called, was partly due to the circumstance that the conditions of society in the Roman world were almost wholly gathered from the estimates of satirists, preachers, and Christian Apologists. These, not unnaturally, looked only at the darker side of the picture, which they reproduced in shadow almost unrelieved. Paul's stern indictment of Paganism in the first chapter of *Romans*,¹ where he speaks "without limitation or qualification," may be partly due to this, though for certain cities and classes the situation was gloomy in the extreme.

"But the Pagan world was not wholly bad. It had its scattered and broken lights which the Apostle recognises with the warmth of genuine sympathy."² These values and features have now been rightly given their place in the final verdict. Luke's estimate of Paganism does not ignore the

¹ Sanday and Headlam, *Romans*, p. 50.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 50.

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brighter side : as the curtain rises in contemporary literature we see inquiring spirits, seekers after God, and a worthy *pietas*, gleams from the Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. Unlikely as it may seem, the first century A.D., even in heathendom, was one of the times of the Spirit.¹ God, who had not left men without His witness, was not far from any one of them, and nearer than they thought. This in itself is an apologetic of amazing value and a tonic to faith ; for, if there be a God at all, He must have business with men everywhere and always. At this time the air was filled with divine pre-movements, and the winds of God were blowing through the Faiths of Paganism.

As an indication and illustration of this we may cite the *Mystery Religions* which had now taken the place of the almost obsolete classical cults. The *Mysteries* were in essence the uprush of ancestral religions older even than the divinities of Olympus ; and, when all the gods of Hellas died, Osiris, Isis, and Mithras came to their own again, like " wild shoots coming up from the hidden roots." ²

But one must not read into these Faiths more than they can carry, or overestimate their spirituality ; certain writers speak of Christianity borrowing from the *Mysteries*, but of this in the early age there is really no evidence. Their spirit was inferior and different ; the Church, seeing their evil, rather antagonised and opposed them, and, fearing them so fiercely, was never, at least in our period, tempted to imitation or adaptation. Later, however, in the

¹ Cf. p. 27.

² Gardner, *The Growth of Christianity*, p. 117.

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second century, some scholars are inclined to see certain reactions between them, especially in the doctrine and practice of the sacraments.

But in giving due weight to the primitive Church's relation to these eastern Faiths, one must not neglect their significance. Such as they were, they bore witness to a spiritual hunger and thirst whose very longing is the Preparation of the Spirit. The desire for Communion with the Unseen, the widespread feeling after *Saviours* and *Salvation*, and a keen sense of sin with its cry for Purification, all show how the heart of man turned to a good higher than he knew. The light he could not see was feeling around him, and, though he had not attained to freedom, he felt the galling of his chain, as he struggled against what he knew to be a bondage alien to the human spirit.

Such stirrings in the heart of Paganism testify to the spiritual currents running through the Roman world, and the yearning of its soul towards the great Reality. Even by their defects the *Mystery Religions* pointed the primitive Church to an effective approach to, and an Apologetic for, the Religion of the Lord of all. In the second century this was developed in historical, philosophical, and theological forms, but in the earliest period the Evangel of Christianity consisted of a few bold lines of primitive simplicity.

We find "this rudimentary or missionary gospel" reflected most faithfully in 1 Thessalonians, and in that summary of the Faith which Paul makes the preface to his exposition of "the Resurrection."¹ A mission address is the likeliest approximation to

¹ 1 Cor. 15⁸.

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the name and the thing itself. The Evangelists of the Faith declared *a living and real God*, universal, personal and ethical, into whose communion men had access through *a Divine Mediator*, His Son, whom He raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come. The eschatological element was never wanting in their appeal, and in this *Acts* and the Epistles are thoroughly at one. *Communion* also, both the word and the idea, was closely bound up with what Paganism spoke of as *soteria*, salvation. Appealing to the sense of sin so universally present in the conscience of the day, not perhaps its guilt, but the weakness and impotence which it brings, the missionaries brought the Good News, as they called it, of One who died for our sins, and whose forgiveness saved from the sin itself—"Pardon sealed by Power." In a world where men felt so keenly their inability to will their will and work their work in all the better things they knew and praised, Christianity promised *Power* from *on High* to make men able for anything through Him that makes us able. One can feel how such a message, which thrills us yet, for it still has its ancient power, should thrill the hearts of men who were so conscious of their bondage that, in a pathetic image, they compared their life to that of a dog, tied behind the carriage wheels of its master. On the other hand, the New Testament abounds with such words as *power* and *victory*, for "we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us." In contrast with Roman religion, in which holiness was defined by Cicero as *the knowledge of ritual and sacrifice*,¹ "the interest of the preachers

¹ Cf. Gwatkin, *The Knowledge of God*, ii. p. 133.

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in real Christian goodness was intense and unmistakable," and they never let their hearers forget the piety which blossomed out and was fruitful in all the virtues of life, "the deeds of week-day holiness," at home and in the throngs of men. A real and open-air Imitation of Christ was assiduously preached—"to walk as He walked," to live, as the modern philosopher says, so that Jesus Christ may approve of what you are doing. This, in itself, was a powerful Apologia to a society so corrupt, in which, nevertheless, Christians shone as lights in a dark world, *holding forth the Word of Life*. Gibbon, in his famous chapter on the Progress of the Christian Religion¹ notes among the Five Causes of its success, "the pure and austere morals of the Christians." Lastly, Christianity set Life and Immortality in the light, as the lamp of earth's darkest place. The longing for this, man's hope, that he was not made to die, and the frustration of it by some dark and inscrutable fate, are sufficiently evident in the elegiac poetry of the Augustan and later ages. In this connection Gibbon singles out the doctrine of the future life, improved by every additional circumstance which could give weight and efficacy to that important truth, as one of the causes of the rapid progress of Christianity.

This rapid survey includes practically all the leading truths on which the Primitive Church relied as an Apologetic in the face of Paganism. As "a sign that was spoken against," truth as it is in Jesus had to plead its cause before all sorts and conditions of men and religions. It was done cheerfully and confidently, for the preachers felt

¹ *The Decline and Fall*, i. 15.

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they had a message that could commend itself to every man's conscience before God ; their religion was no secret mystery transacted only among the initiated behind closed doors. In the courage of their Master they braved the ordeal of discussion with each and all everywhere ; that they were very sure of God may be read in the words of Jesus treasured in the consciousness of the Church—"What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in the light, and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops." This in itself was a convincing Apologetic that, for their message, the missionaries dared publicity and welcomed it.

The foregoing statement is confirmed when we turn for illustration to *Acts*. A good deal has been made of the differences between Luke and Paul in his letters. There *are* differences, but there are also underlying correspondences of fact and faith. To quote Harnack:¹ "All that St Luke has performed in portraying St Paul, by means of the three great discourses (in Antioch, Athens, and Ephesus) deserves high praise. Judging simply from the epistles, we may well believe that the apostle would have spoken to receptive Jews, in substance at least, just as he speaks in the *Acts* at Antioch, and to Gentiles as he speaks at Athens, and that he would have exhorted his own converts just as he does at Miletus ; this last discourse also contains . . . several distinct utterances whose authenticity (as regards their content) is confirmed by the Epistles . . . indeed this whole discourse to the Ephesians calls to mind the Epistles to the Thessalonians. The author of the Acts of the

¹ *Luke the Physician*, pp. 138, 139.

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Apostles not a disciple of the Apostle! Who, I ask, except one who knew St. Paul personally could portray him as he appears in this book? . . . The abundance of actual fact which is therein afforded still makes it possible to pass behind the external action to the inward motive."

These harmonies, to which Harnack bears such emphatic testimony, will become apparent as we examine the representative passages through which Luke, in his account of the Pauline mission, develops the leading religious ideas of the primitive Faith. These will be found in the speeches at Lystra and Athens, in the interviews of Paul with Felix, and his defences before Agrippa and Festus the Roman Governor.

At Lystra¹ Christianity made its first (recorded) contact with the heathen world, for, concerning the earlier mission to Cyprus, the substance of the message is not given. The Lycaonian story is deeply significant both in word and example, because in that Galatian town the Apostles laid a foundation for a new conception of God, which is always the first step in the purification of religion. When Copernicus found the sun to be the centre of the solar system, he pointed the path to an orderly universe and to astronomical progress. No less decisive is that doctrine of God by which every religion is judged in an estimate of its worth and place in the scale of values. Even in Israel, so long as its theology was tied up with the notion of a tribal or national deity, there was stagnation in religious thought; its endeavours led nowhere, and the Hope of Immortality (to take only one instance)

¹ Acts 14⁸⁻¹⁸.

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could not emerge. But when, in the age of the great prophets, Monotheism had been reached, the Everlasting Doors were opened and the human spirit set free for that long quest which always finds its goal.

The fatal blight of Paganism had been that it worked with an imperfect and faulty conception of God, whereby its whole universe, in nature and man, in religion and social ethics, was tangled and confused. But when the Apostles proclaimed the living, beneficent, and working God, light broke over heathen darkness and men saw the glory of God in the face of Jesus—the Christ-likeness of God; as our Lord Himself said, “he that hath seen Me, hath seen the Father.” At Lystra “the first great utterance of Christian Theology shone like a beam of light upon the darkness of heathendom.”¹

Under the influence of a miracle of healing, the people of Lystra—their use of the Lycaonian tongue showed them to be the less educated and more superstitious part of the population²—made ready to sacrifice in honour of the Apostles, whom they regarded as gods. The *genius of the place* probably influenced their thoughts, for there was a legend that, in the neighbouring Phrygia, Zeus and Hermes had made themselves known to mortal men.³ The sacrifice in their honour was in actual preparation at the temple of Zeus before the city, when Paul and Barnabas, distressed at the idolatry,

¹ Stier, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

² Lystra was a military post, and Luke distinguishes the Lycaonian inhabitants from the Roman *Colonia*. Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller*, p. 119.

³ Cf. the classical tale of Philemon and Baucis.

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rushed out exclaiming, "Men, what is this you are doing? We are but human with natures like your own. The glad news we are preaching to you is to turn from such futile ways (or, "these vain and imaginary Ones") to God, *the Living*, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all that is in them. In bygone days He allowed all nations to go their own ways, though as *the Bountiful Giver* He did not leave Himself without a *Witness*, giving you rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, giving you food and joy to your hearts' content."

This can only be a summary and bare outline of the speech, for Luke was not there; yet, with certain differences of sympathy, it is in substantial agreement with the Epistles and the Pauline spirit and vocabulary.

The lines of this early Apologetic to Paganism stand out quite clearly: a living God, a bountiful Giver, whose Witness fell across their own fields, in the world of nature with its providential government and adaptation to the needs of men. It is very elementary and primitive—milk for babes—this simple statement of Natural Religion. The witness of God is not by conscience—this will come later—but in the obvious outward experience of the natural world, "Where harvests ripen Thou art there, who givest all." As we have already hinted, the speech is but a fragment of a larger whole, for, on their return journey, the Apostles strengthened the souls of the disciples (Lois, Eunice, and Timothy among them?), encouraged them to hold on by the faith, and told them in a genuine Lukan touch that "We have to get into the Kingdom of God through many a trouble." This exhortation

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implies a gospel far beyond the limits of Natural Religion, which is only the *paidagogos* to lead men into the School of Christ.

But for the purposes of our own day, *the Method* is as important as the contents of the message. In Luke's record of it there is no appeal to the inner room of religion, which the people neither knew nor at first could have appreciated, but we have a simple, almost naïve, presentation of a living God and Benefactor. To unlettered farming-folks and field-workers the gospel was given in names and titles they could understand.¹ The speech is not a polemic against heathenism, but rather an opening up of what should have been implicit in their own belief.

As such, the address at Lystra stands for the Church's instruction and guidance in her Apologetic at home and abroad. The lesson is being learned that, in missionary work among such religions as Hinduism and Mohammedanism, more use might be made of the method employed at Lystra; and, generally, whether in the Mission Field or among estranged populations at home, it is recognised that Christianity, in its first approach, stands to win, less by opposition to what is false, and more by an understanding appeal on common ground and in a religious vocabulary *understood* by the people. "Now," says Dr Donald Fraser of Livingstonia, "I do not think that a missionary wins a people by antagonisms. The efficient Evangelist will appreciate every good in other men's faith, and then he

¹ In Asia Minor the great God was regularly addressed by his worshippers as "The God," the title used here. Cf. Ramsay, *op. cit.*, p. 118; also Wade, *N.T. History*, p. 532.

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will find avenues of approach to the perfect revelation of Christ.”¹ To the same effect Dr J. H. Moulton remarks, “In past days there was not a little of sheer iconoclasm with which men went forth to drag men out of their systems of unredeemed darkness and error. It was not worth while to toil towards an understanding of these heathen systems: the missionary’s duty was to destroy them, root and branch, as works of the devil. All this has passed away. In every part of the field the most typical missionaries are seen to be bending their whole force of brain and heart to the great task of acquiring a sympathetic understanding of their people’s thoughts. Even those who labour among the lowest Animists are no exception to the rule. The majority are reported as holding that God has not left Himself without witness in these peoples, and that the missionary must look for the element of good, and build upon it. This sympathetic attitude is the attitude of Paul himself at Lystra.”²

At home like considerations apply. The Churches are met with the continual complaint that they do not approach with appreciative sympathy or knowledge the aspirations of the working classes, or of those who, through mental stress and the world-upheaval, have lost the faith they had; that organised Christianity meets these men with a vocabulary that is difficult, and foreign to common thought and life. Allowing for all exaggeration of reproach, there must be so much truth in all this as to make us turn anew to the speech of Lystra

¹ An address to the United Free Church Assembly, 1922.

² *Religions and Religion*, pp. 91-93.

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recorded in the sympathetic report of Luke. The quotation on the fore-page of this book—"Acts (for unique interest and value) has no fellow within the New Testament or without it"—may seem exaggerated, but in the light of the book, with its sympathetic and understanding method of approach to other religions, the words may be allowed. One does not mean that the bare letter of any ancient Apologetic can be wholly carried over into a different mental and moral climate, without reserve and without change. The time for this literalism has passed. But we have to present our Apologetic so that "each of us hears in his own native tongue," and thus win the commendation, "We hear these men talking of the triumphs of God in our own language." That duty confronts the modern Church—the interpretation of the Christian message, which, even in the New Testament, is continually being re-interpreted for accent and emphasis in many forms and fashions. "I am much struck with the fact," says the late Principal Iverach, "revealed to us by the *Papyri* recently discovered in Egypt, with the large amount of Greek Literature contained in them, that the New Testament is not written in the language of the schools, or in the language of the literature of the time, but in the common language which the common people used in daily intercourse, in the market-place and in the family. It is a most instructive lesson to the preacher. Do not preach in mere literary language, do not use the language of Philosophy, or Psychology, or Science, or even of Theology."¹

The methods of Apostolic men, and their inter-

¹ *The Christian Message*, pp. 11, 12.

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pretation of religious ideas, speak to us in the twentieth century, as they ruled the development of religion in the first; they show us the principles of a valid Apologetic: to understand a man's position and its antecedents; to give him the credit of the very best in his belief, faulty though it be. "It is better to fight for the good than to rail at the ill." The Lord and Master of us all came not to destroy but to fulfil.

Luke's sympathetic valuation of the better things in Paganism, in some respects unique for appreciation in the New Testament, is in striking agreement with the highest in the older Scripture. There is the broad and lofty teaching of the second Isaiah; the book of Jonah, though overweighted with an ancient symbol, which we are now learning to translate, is for sympathy the finest missionary tract ever written. In the closing book of the Old Testament we find such a recognition as this—"For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same My Name is great among the Gentiles, and in every place incense is offered unto my Name, and a pure offering, for my Name is great among the Gentiles, saith the Lord." Justin Martyr and other apologists of the second century appropriate the words as a veiled reference to the Sacraments of the Church, but in their first intention and use "Malachi must have recognised a spirit of Monotheism in heathen religions. The passage is a tribute to the truer and better side of heathen religion." ¹

This is the spirit of Luke in the Lystra incident; we have found already an anticipation of it ² in

¹ "Malachi," Driver: *Century Bible*, p. 304.

² Page 69.

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the story of the *Broad Churchman*, Cornelius, who is welcomed with the recognition that "In every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is acceptable to Him."

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CHAPTER XII

THE APOLOGETIC OF ACTS—II

TO THE ATHENIANS

“I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known Me ;
I girded thee, though thou hast not known Me.”

IN his account of the expansion of Christianity in the Roman world Luke gives two specimen addresses which unfold the Apologetic to paganism. The first of these (that at Lystra) was spoken to an uneducated and frankly pagan population. In it there appear the broad outlines, the ground plan and method, by which primary religious ideas were communicated to primitive peoples. To them the Apostle brought the treasure of the Gospel in the earthen vessel of what we are accustomed to call Natural Religion.

But at Athens Paul was in quite a different climate: and though we must not think of the home of Pericles and all the witchery of that city of song, yet, even in the first century of our era, every educated man called Athens mother. In her Gardens and Porches there gathered from all the world seekers after wisdom, the representatives and masters of those who know. Though political power had passed from the Ilissus to the Tiber, the fame of the city lingered in a long afterglow which drew men to her as to a shrine of culture and beauty. By contrast to Lystra the horizons have

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lifted, and in Luke's narrative the moral and intellectual change is thoroughly appreciated. While the former Apologetic is sustained and confirmed, there is a striking difference. In Lycaonia the appeal is made to the accepted inferences of Natural Religion, and the Witness of God is found not so much in moral values, as in the facts of the world He has made. But at Athens, while these evidences remain, the Light of the World Himself appears in a new and deeper revelation.

Paul came to Athens not by plan but through one of those providential hindrances by which God so often fulfils His will in a man's life. Driven from Thessalonica, but hoping to return, he sought a temporary refuge until Silas and Timothy should report that the door was reopened. Their arrival, however, brought no good news; so, sending back Timothy to comfort the Thessalonian Church, and Silas to Philippi, Paul remained in Athens, alone with all his hopes and fears. It has been suggested that Luke also was with him as his physician, but of this the inferential evidence is not conclusive.

In the account, as vivid as if it were that of an eye-witness, we see the Apostle wandering through the city "with the interest," Ramsay suggests, "of an American student from Harvard visiting Oxford for the first time." He had landed at the harbour of the Piræus, and on foot passed along the broad street which led to the city, five miles distant. It was a place made for history, but the glamour of it was dimmed for the Apostle in the paroxysm of horror which discovered altars and idols on every side. Renan suggests that Paul could not distinguish between the religion of Art

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and vulgar idolatry—"Alas, fair gods and goddesses, true divinities, behold the man who has lifted the hammer against you! The fatal words have gone forth, 'Ye are idols!' The error of that ugly little Jew has sealed your doom." But this hectic indignation over the lack of appreciation for the monuments of ancient art is largely wasted. If we admit Hebrew prejudice, on the other hand, the Apostle was a citizen of the world, and not merely a provincial Jew; he did not spend his boyhood in Tarsus and its university without knowing something of the moral blight of what Milton calls *idolism*. He had not, and could not have had, the religious detachment which sees Art just for Art's sake; behind these images, statues, and altars he read the tokens of a system which led men captive to a material view of the world, and exalted the creature above the Creator. This is the essence of paganism and its corrupting plague spot as Paul saw it. It was not this idolatry or that which vexed his soul, but the underlying conception that gave this scheme of things power to obscure the spiritual view and interpretation of the Universe. Naturalism, the essential heathen spirit, is the enemy at any time, for "where idols flourish, ideals perish." In this connection Professor E. F. Scott¹ says: "The Apostle is thinking not so much of ancient heathenism, as of an intellectual temp^r which manifests itself in all times, and was never so conspicuous as it is to-day. . . . It is true as much as ever that God is the necessary postulate of any attempt to make the world intelligible." The alternative may be put in a sentence: Have natural forces the

¹ *The Apologetic of the New Testament*, p. 244.

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last word in our world, or must we bow before spiritual forces and their final imperative? Here we are in contact with two contrasted world-views which cannot be reconciled.

Before discussing the speech, a word must be said on the Apostle's earlier ministry in the *Agora*, for it is a valuable picture of primitive Christian preaching. Paul argued in the market-place daily with those who chanced to be present. The shadow of Socrates falls across the crowds of men, for informal discussion like this was the staple of the Socratic method. No respectable women are in the audience, only "gay and gilded Greeks," with nothing to do, sauntering under the willows and plane trees, or gathering in little circles about a favourite speaker: it is a compound of parliament, exchange, and debating society, or like the concourse witnessed on a demonstration-day. "Idlers gather round in a bantering, chaffing mood," and, mingling here and there, representatives of the philosophies of the time—Stoics and Epicureans. The scene is familiar in many a picture of Greek life: Demosthenes, for instance, blames his Athenians, as Luke does here, for ears itching to hear some newer thing, when wisdom and the public safety demand action.

To these *dilettanti* Paul preached Jesus and the Resurrection—his gospel; but alas! he sowed where there was no deepness of earth.

In passing, we remind ourselves that in *Acts*, "preaching" often means not a set oration or address, but a simple conversational appeal, with question and answer to make the points and their application—a market-place discussion, as the verb in the text implies. Not the worst kind of preaching

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or the least effective! happily the Church is now rediscovering that every religion, ancient or modern, takes to the market-place to seek its verdict—and, in religious effectiveness, to find it. Luke has preserved the atmosphere of the *Agora*, in the ejaculations and rejoinders of the crowd. They called Paul “a picker-up of learning’s crumbs,” who retailed the fragments that fell from the tables of the wise. But the more serious of the audience accused him of the fault for which their fathers had condemned Socrates, that “he was bringing in other new divinities.” Finally, on some special occasion, they challenged him to state his views more fully in the Council of the Areopagus (surely the Council, and not Mar’s Hill, too distant and sacred) which even yet had some kind of responsibility for the religion and morals of the city. The inscription on a wayside altar provided an apt text for the address to the Council. In his wandering through the streets Paul had come across an altar upon which, in ancient times, had been inscribed “To the Unknown God”; this became his text. Allusions to such dedications have been found in classical writers, and these bear witness to the naïve ambiguity by which men guarded themselves, when the identity of the appropriate god could not be ascertained. If it be nothing more than one of the happy coincidences of history, it is significant that Paul in this speech seems to quote from Epimenides, the Cretan poet, called by Plato “a divine man,” who once advised the Athenians to build altars to an unknown god.¹ Even those who had outgrown

¹ *The Hidden Romance of the New Testament*, J. A. Robertson, pp. 49, 50.

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their belief in the divinities, were tempted, in times of stress, to a formal acknowledgment of them, for, in a world where God was the great Uncertainty, "You never know," they said.

Propitiating his audience (an element in every reverent Apologetic) the Apostle gave them the praise of being, "more than others, respectful of what is divine." In a prelude, which carries neither sting of reproach nor censure of unreality, he announces his subject—"That divine nature which you worship, not knowing what it is—this I set forth unto you." "Paul meets the soul of paganism half-way in its uncertain gropings, and starts from the simplest platform common to both."¹

For the purpose of this chapter, which does not aim at an exposition, it is not necessary to give more than a summary of the address. Beginning with the fundamental ideas of Natural Theology, Paul declares God as the World-Maker, Lord of heaven and earth, who has created all nations from a common origin. As such, He does not dwell in temples made with hands, nor is He served by them, as if He needed anything, for He Himself is the bountiful Giver. The philosophy of history and its end are set forth: "All history had a meaning and a moral meaning from first to last." God determines the allotted periods of the nations, and the boundaries of their abodes; they have a common origin and a common goal. That God is not the far-off and careless deity of Epicurean thought, but interested in human life—for God and we have business with one another—is illustrated by a quotation from Aratus the Stoic, a poet of Paul's

¹ Bartlet, *Acts* in loc.

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own Cilicia, "We too belong to His race."¹ Idolatry, therefore, is irrational, for an image can in no way represent the fulness of the Divine nature. So far the address has moved on the lines of Natural Religion, but, in a quick transition, the key-note changes; the age-long idolatry, which was a sin of ignorance, God had overlooked; but now, a revelation through the man of His choice had brought them into the light and called for repentance. A world-judgment is coming, and the Judge will be no other than God's Elect whom He has raised from the dead.

The speech was not finished; the Athenians stumbled at the doctrine of the Resurrection, as afterwards Festus interrupted at the same point.² But, incomplete as it is, we read the address with the growing impression, how wonderfully modern it all is, and, as one says "an invaluable method of missionary preaching." It is unique in *Acts*, perhaps even in the New Testament, for the attitude it takes to the religions of paganism. In *Romans*, as we have seen³ Paul's criticism of heathendom is severe, making no allowance for what a modern would call the Evolution of Religion; he affirms that the nations might have seen God in His works; but they refused, and the refusal had blinded their eyes and made them the slaves of sin and self-indulgence. But at Athens, men are described as groping after the Unknown God who was the goal of their endeavour; their idolatry in the past had been a sin of ignorance which God had overlooked; and He did this because it had been in their heart

¹ The thought is found also in the Stoic Cleanthes, 300-220 B.C.

² *Acts* 26²⁴.

³ Page 134.

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to seek Him—it was “the intention of their soul.” This is a very modern Apologetic indeed, and characteristic of Luke’s humanity. How far he is responsible for the thought behind the words we do not know. Is the emphasis due to him?—does he select his material to express his own conception of Christianity as the absolute religion which brings to fruition the subconscious aspirations of a world that was everywhere turning its face to the light? This would be characteristic. He certainly reports Paul as assuming that “the very religious” Athenians had been worshipping, though ignorantly, the true God: “I proclaim to you what you worship in your ignorance.”

This attitude is supposed to be due to the Hellenic spirit of Luke, but may rather be attributed to his intimate knowledge of the Septuagint which he quotes so freely. The greater and later Hebrew prophets had a remarkable charity for the ethnic faiths, and fearlessly claimed that, though imperfect, they were not hopeless wanderings that led nowhere. In line with this, our Lord, in words of universal range, sees the *homing* of the ancient world: “Yes, and people will come from east and west, and north and south, to their places at the feast in the Kingdom of God.”¹ This is also the attitude of the great missionaries of to-day: “While believing with all their heart that it is only Christianity which can redeem and save the world, they realise that in every religion there is some touch of the divine, that in God, all, even the heathen, live and move and have their being.”² The glimmering light of heathenism

¹ Luke 13²⁹.

² Percy Gardner, *The Modern Churchman*, p. 206.

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is a light from Heaven. This comforting thought has found expression in the lines of Longfellow:—

Ye whose hearts are fresh and simple,
Who have faith in God and nature,
Who believe that in all ages
There are longings, yearnings, strivings
For the good they comprehend not ;
That the feeble hands and helpless,
Groping blindly in the darkness,
Touch God's right hand in that darkness
And are lifted up and strengthened.

In the two typical addresses to heathendom, we find an answer to the question, "What had Paul to say to the pagan world?" His mission to the Synagogue, with all its difficulties, had this in its favour, that the way had been prepared by the discipline of Judaism. When, however, the Apostle touched the Greek cities, heredity, custom, and an ancient culture were all against him. But he was not left alone or helpless, for in his experience there was fulfilled the far-seeing word of our Lord for just such circumstances: "When they bring you before synagogues and the magistrates and authorities, do not trouble yourselves about how to defend yourselves or what to say, for the holy Spirit will teach you at that hour what you should say."¹ This inner light gave Paul an understanding eye for the needs of the day. Moreover, the accommodation to other men's minds, the adaptability he practised in Athens, is no hasty improvisation, for in one of his letters there is outlined the working-plan of a wise evangelism:—

¹ Luke 12¹¹, 12.

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“To Jews I have become like a Jew—to win over Jews ;

To those under the Law, I have become as one of themselves—to win over those under the Law;

To those outside the Law, I have become like one of themselves—to win over those outside the Law ;

To the weak I have become as weak myself—to win over the weak.

To all men I have become all things—to save some by all and every means.”

This principle, like many others, can be abused, and, in the hands of unspiritual men may become the flag of indifference or opportunism. Yet Paul's Apologetic, as has been said, “is really an anxious, spiritual sympathy.” He endeavours to open the door by understanding, and not by repulsion, while he conciliates prejudice by taking the best out of Stoicism and Epicureanism, the dominant philosophies of the day. The former, though it sometimes withered into tiresome Pharisaism and individualism, becoming only a light to itself, in the Apostle's century had the idealism and outlook of a living though imperfect faith. Among the Stoics, Paul related his message to one of their cherished doctrines—the unity of the human race: “All nations He has created from a common origin.” Plutarch, who has so many sidelights and reflections of primitive Christianity, writes concerning Stoicism, “The famous *Republic* of Zeno, founder of the Stoic sect, all tends to this one point: that instead of living by cities, or by peoples separated from each other by private rights, we should count all men fellow-countrymen and fellow-citizens, that our life and our

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world may be one, as though we were a gregarious herd bred up under a common law.”¹ Epicureanism was more remote from the Apostle’s sympathy, but we do it an injustice by identifying it only with coarse pleasure. It might be degraded to that, yet, taking it at its best, the philosophy has been compared to Modern Utilitarianism, “the commonsense standard of the world.” The declaration that God is not dependent on our gifts is found in the verse of Lucretius, “The nature of the gods needs nothing from us.” But Paul is not quoting from the high-priest of Epicureanism; more likely his thought had its origin in the fiftieth Psalm where it forms the staple of the argument.²

These correspondences of thought need not be taken as evidence of the Apostle’s knowledge of the Classics; they show, however, that he was thoroughly *en rapport* with his audience. Such religious ideas were current coin in the intellectual exchange of the first century, and the Apostle, according to his own principle, freely made market with them; he utilised what was best in the culture of the time, and, as one suggests, baptised Hellenism into primitive Christian universalism. In Luke’s record, this method pervades all propaganda to paganism; purely Jewish ideas are not obtruded, but the appeal is made to the Witness of God in “a soul naturally Christian.”

Rackham³ calls this address “a typical sermon to the Gentiles.” The heart is first won by the goodness and love of God before there is any reference to the terrors of the Great Day. Fear is not the *paidagogos* that leads men to Christ; but grace

¹ J. M. Creed, *The Modern Churchman* (Oxford Conference Number), October 1922.

² Cf. Wade, *New Testament History*, p. 552.

³ *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 132.

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anticipates, and mercy rejoices over judgment. Yet Paul knew that these philosophies, even at their best, had feeble lifting and redeeming power. If by liberality and sympathy he endeavoured to win men, it was to Christianity itself that he won them ; as a wise fisher of men he did not use a barbless hook. In Athens, as afterwards to the worthless Felix, he challenged the common conscience of mankind, which was on his side, and preached a living Christ raised from the dead to be the Judge of men. Thus, " In this short address at Athens, the Apostle had preached both Jesus and the Resurrection."

That the sermon was barely successful has been inferred from the Apostle's change of appeal, when, departing from Athens, he came to Corinth. But we have found that variety of method is characteristic of primitive evangelism ; God fulfils Himself in many ways, then and now. Luke's meagre tale of results has been assumed to reflect on the wisdom of the philosophic discourse to the Athenians : " Some men, however, did join him and believe, including Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman called Damaris, and some others." The correctness of the inference may be doubted ; a modern sermon to a learned Society could hardly be called fruitless, if such a tale of converts followed. The seed, even if it were a mustard seed, had been planted to bloom to profit afterwards ; in the saints of Athens to whom Origen witnesses ; in its Christian Schools ; and in Aristides, a philosopher of Athens, who addressed to the Emperor¹ the first Christian Apology.

Moreover, in Luke's moderate estimate of results from the address, we may find the surest evidence

¹ Probably Antoninus Pius, A.D. 138-161.

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of the historical good faith of the narrative. It is safe to say that any writer, after this period, who had to go to his imagination for his facts, would have a different story to tell.

In *Acts* the Apologetic is found arising out of certain definite historical situations; there is no theology, as theology; what there is, is *Gospel*, the appeal of the *Good News* to souls athirst for certitude, peace, and power; at each turning moment the truth of Christianity is related to need, to the currents that were racing in the life of the time, whether in cultured Athens or pleasure-loving Corinth.

As to the sympathetic breadth and universality of the Apologetic in the primitive Christian Church we may conclude with Principal Rainy: "The Apologists, then, hardly ask the Gentile mind to change much in its better thoughts about God and virtue; but they offer the new certainty¹ and the new encouragement which Christianity imparts. For the sake of these, Greece might well accept the articles which embody direct divine interposition in the incarnation and the eschatology. Christianity is a religion in which the life of well-doing becomes an assured career. That which has heretofore been an ideal, no doubt remarkably put in practice by some select souls, was now to come home, convincingly and fruitfully, to men in general, to common men and maidens, not less than to the wise."²

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¹ Cf. *Acts* 18³¹.

² *The Ancient Catholic Church*, pp. 89, 90.

CHAPTER XIII

THE EVANGELISM OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH

“Go to the byways and invite anyone you meet to the marriage-banquet.”

IN the memorable fifteenth chapter of *The Decline and Fall*, Gibbon claims that an inquiry into the progress and establishment of Christianity forms a very essential part of the history of the Roman Empire. He describes that world as invaded by open violence, or undermined by slow decay; then, in the well-known words, he continues: “A pure and humble religion gently insinuated itself into the minds of men, grew up in silence and obscurity, derived new vigour from opposition, and finally erected the triumphant banner of the Cross on the ruins of the Capitol.”

Gibbon disclaims the intention of any inquiry into first principles, but proposes an investigation of the secondary causes that led to the rapid growth of the Christian religion. One may regret the exception he makes, as one laments that Bury, in the preface to a *History of Greece*, expressly rules out of his view “literature and art, philosophy and religion.” This limitation we read with a sense of loss, because literature and art, philosophy and religion, these are Greece, just as the first causes, which Gibbon leaves out of his picture, are Christianity. Both these writers, however, interpret

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their rule of exclusion "liberally," for there is a necessity in essential things which cannot be ruled out.

But Luke, the historian of the primitive Church, makes no such exception of ruling principles; in his story we are in contact from the beginning with the primary religious ideas that guide the development of the movement.

In the foregoing pages we have considered many of these, and, in the immediately preceding chapters, have shown by what methods of appeal, to the unlearned and the learned, primitive preachers pleaded their cause. For the most part their apologetic was their gospel; yet, good as it proved to be, the world was not won by apologetics, however skilful; and we have seen how inspired and relevant the apologists were. But even the best of these defenders of the faith, as a general rule, touched only the fringe of the people, and, for effectiveness, the Church relied, as it always has to rely, on what has been called "hand-to-hand work," on individual touch and the power of consecrated personality. The saints, the devoted ones, have always been the best preachers of the gospel:—

Saints of the early dawn of Christ,
Saints of Imperial Rome,
Saints of the cloistered Middle Age,
Saints of the modern home.

There are few records of their work, even in the New Testament; for, like the many brave men before Agamemnon, they lacked the sacred bard to tell their story. Though incidental references to them are found in the Pauline literature, it is Luke

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in the *Acts* who has best preserved the names and service of the pioneers of the Faith; Peter, the man of rock, and Philip, who is described as the Evangelist, come first in the succession, followed by Paul, Barnabas, Silas, Priscilla, John, Mark, and Timothy. Most of the other fellow-labourers are anonymous; the waves of time have not divided to let them through, but "their names are in the book of life."

Many aims have been urged as the *motif* at the heart of Luke's narrative in *Acts*—historical, religious, political, the personal defence of Paul on his trial, and so forth. They may all be admitted: the error lies in making any one of them too exclusive. But, undoubtedly, to record the Evangelism of the Church, its method and variety, is one of the ruling purposes of the book.

Sixteen items of an evangelistic itinerary are found in *Acts*, and in every instance the same verb, which may be translated *passed through*, is employed. The word is even used to characterise our Lord's personal missionary-work (*He went about doing good*, A.V.), as afterwards it is taken to describe Paul's sightseeing in Athens (*as I passed along*). The verb occurs with the regularity of a technical symbol: readers of Xenophon will remember a similarly recurring formula (*thence he proceeds*) in the march of *The Ten Thousand*.

If Providence rules in the choice of a word, Luke is describing *Missionary itineration*, "leisurely thoroughness of progress";¹ in his narrative he invariably adopts this pictorial term to call attention to the successive stages in "the flight of the dove."

¹ *Acts*, Bartlet, p. 209.

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In the itinerary the names of the Evangelists are given as a roll of honour in the Church's warfare and work. But behind these there was the Christian community itself, for *Evangelist* in the vocabulary of *Acts* describes a function, and not the ecclesiastical office, which came later.

Persecution first sent these heralds into the field: "They that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word"—a text which has been interpreted, "They went about and talked everywhere." With Wesley, they looked upon all the world as their parish: "Tradesmen, soldiers, travellers, and workmen who had been converted to Christianity, wherever they went, whether on business or driven by persecution, told the story of the Cross; were witnesses to its transforming power in their own lives, and urged the acceptance of the Saviour upon all with whom they came in contact. No matter what the trade or occupation of these men, and regardless of the errand which carried them forth, or the environment which hemmed them in, they transmuted every circumstance into an opportunity, and made each a means of extending the Faith."¹ Such activity was soon going on throughout the Roman world: *broadcasting* was their business, and *listening-in* what they aimed to produce in those they came in contact with. Sowing the seed, putting the leaven into the mass, they went out in the joyful rapture of the new life, as men go into a great adventure.

Though he belongs to a later time, Celsus,² in

¹ *Traits of the Twelve*, Schell, p. 132.

² A.D. 178.

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his work *True Word Against Christians*, may be quoted for his picture, an almost unconscious tribute to the travelling Evangelists: "There are many nameless persons who in the most facile manner act as if they were inspired. They go through the cities, declaiming within the temples and outside the temples, and through the armies, everywhere attracting attention." Then he adds the invitation given by the Mystery Religions, "Let everyone come who is free from stain, and his soul conscious of innocence, and who has lived an upright life," and thus makes his contrast, "But these Christians call on those who are sinners, those who are foolish, on children, and on the unfortunates, and offer them the Kingdom of God."¹ Origen in his refutation, in the next generation, makes to this the obvious and glorious reply, "They that be whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick."

How this Evangelism proceeded may be seen in the section-endings in which Luke reviews the past while he has his eye towards the future; by their help we can reconstruct the successive movements in the mission programme of the Church. "Beginning at Jerusalem" was in our Lord's commission to the *Twelve*, and from this as a centre the circle widened to the bounds of the Roman world: "Ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."²

Universalism was implicit from the very first. Persecution widened the range; under its pressure

¹ Cf. *Early Church History*, Backhouse and Tylor, p. 108-109.

² *Acts* 1⁸.

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the faith ran along the seaboard of Palestine, finding a home in Joppa and Cæsarea, in the Philistine country at Azotus (Ashdod) and northward to the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. Even before Paul's conversion Christians (*they that were of the Way*) might be looked for in Damascus. Antioch, in the far north, caught the fire, and soon became a second centre and the mother of missions to the Empire; the message crossed the sea to Cyprus, and travelled with Paul to his retreat in Tarsus. These successive points of light had begun to gleam while the first century was still young, and they gave promise that it would soon be daylight everywhere.

In the missionary journeys of Paul and Silas, Barnabas and Mark, the Roman roads became the highways of the messengers of peace; strategic points were seized; and in the chief commercial towns of Asia Minor, ere the century was half done, a hearing had been gained, and churches founded as *nuclei* of life for the surrounding districts.

Many causes contributed to this amazing record of progress; the Greek tongue, not the difficult, classical language, but the flexible, homely *Koiné* of the market and the street, proved an admirable vehicle of expression everywhere. The broad shield of Roman law, as Luke shows, protected the preachers, while facility and freedom of travel by sea and land opened up the world; a witness to this is found in the epitaph of a Phrygian merchant which records that he had made the long journey to Rome seventy-two times. To the same effect we read how Aquila and Priscilla came from Pontus on the Black Sea to distant Rome, are found at

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Corinth and Ephesus, whence they migrated back again to Rome. The seas were safe; in all the facilities for travel they afforded, men heard the call of the open road which they made the Way of the Lord. Luke himself was a born traveller, with the Greek love of the sea; and the journeys of Paul are almost a guide-book to the provinces of the East. These external providences are parts of the preparation and the fulness of the times of the Gentiles.

More intimate, however, and personal was the infectious joy of the Missioners, which Harnack celebrates: "What a trumpet note of joy, courage, and triumph sounds through the whole Lukan history, from the first to the last pages! *Vexilla regis prodeunt*—the banners of the King advance. We listen in vain for this note in the other evangelists. They are burdened with a far heavier load of cares, of thoughts, and doctrines than this Greek enthusiast for Christ, who courageously marches forward, surmounting every difficulty."¹

The Evangelists were happy also in the opportunity of their mission: the world was stretching out its hands to God: the hour of Providence had struck, and the time for favour had come. We have seen that the first century of our era was one of the times of the Spirit; the age-long search for God, for certitude, and peace had never been more eager; religious need, like a plaintive undertone, breathed through multitudes who, having lost confidence in their old religions, were athirst for a draught of the water of life.

And in this acceptable time the preachers came

¹ *Luke the Physician*, p. 163.

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with a Gospel whose assurance and hope are reflected in the first Epistle of Peter addressed to the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia—"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! by His great mercy we have been born again into a living hope, through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead; born to an incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading inheritance; it is kept in heaven for you, and the power of God keeps you by faith till you do inherit the salvation which is all ready to be revealed in the last hour."¹ For religious certainty and joy, for the hope that looks through death there is nothing to be compared with this, even in the New Testament. One can understand the rapture with which such a message was welcomed both in the Ghetto and the Market-place.

The Evangelism, however, was not in word only, but in the sane and far-seeing character which expressed itself in a very effective organisation of helpfulness. Here we touch Gibbon's first cause of the progress of Christianity—"The zeal and social spirit of the early Church." This fraternity Luke sets in the foreground of *Acts*, in which he details the economic union of the community, with its care for widows and orphans. No Christian was left to stand alone, for they were members one of another, and received into a closely compacted fellowship—received into the number, with a right to all the privileges of the sons of God. As the faith spread abroad, the organisation followed; hence, the Christian, as traveller, workman, or merchant, when he came into distant cities, might

¹ 1 Peter 1³.

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be reasonably sure of finding friends and helpers. This is not socialism or communism of the modern type, but the brotherhood of a group, the members of which were bound each to each by the strong and sacred ties of the common faith. The co-partnership of Paul with Aquila and Priscilla is an illustration of what was constantly happening to the rank and file of the Church's army: "In Corinth he came across a Jew called Aquila and his wife Priscilla; Paul accosted them, and as he belonged to the same trade, he stayed with them, and they all worked together." In the speech at Miletus we find an explicit reference to the helpfulness and charity of the Church: addressing the elders of Ephesus the Apostle said, "I showed you how this was the way, to work hard and succour the needy;" he concludes on the note that was dear to the heart of Luke, "Remember the words of the Lord Jesus how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive."

In the trouble which arose because of the gospel, the preachers followed the advice of the Master, "When they persecute you in one city, flee ye to another"; there they would not be left friendless, while their wives and children were safe in the care of the brethren. Persecution, at first, was not universal, depending, as it often did, on the locality or the character of the governor; the more peaceful districts extended help; and one congregation, if the name may be allowed, came to the assistance of another. In this union of hearts and resources the Church found solidarity, and with that a gathering influence upon the community.¹

¹ Cf. *Historical Setting of the Early Gospel*, Hall, chap. iii.

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This sketch of the economic organisation of the *Brotherhood* is not a limelight fancy, but taken in the daylight of history, to represent an actual experience in Evangelism and church founding. As such, the principle of it stands out for our imitation, and, alas ! for our rebuke. Socialism and Labour, wiser in their generation than Churches often are, do not neglect kindred influences. The rejoinder is commonplace that such a system would not work in the complicated modern world ; but no system can be transported bodily out of its environment into new conditions ; yet, if the cries for fellowship in the Church mean anything, they point to comradeship like this in principle and intention ; moreover, ominous voices are emphatic that the present system does not work. Here is a practical union of Evangelism and social organisation, the one not without the other, to show that Love never faileth ! This successful experiment was promoted by what Gibbon calls "the union and discipline of the Christian republic." In the group-system into which Christianity brought a believer, it was a privilege and necessity to abide. Outside, unless he had resources or powerful friends, he remained an unsheltered and helpless unit with sometimes only a number for a name. Inside, he became the brother for whom Christ died, a fellow-heir with the saints and of the household of God. The working-classes found even their social salvation within the brotherhood—in their group.

From the procedure detailed in the Corinthian letter we can see, on the other hand, how the ban of the Church could become a sentence of social death. By "the union and discipline of the

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Christian republic," the weak were strengthened, the disorderly admonished, and many, by the pure and austere standard of their community, were restrained from the temptations that would have carried them away from the Fellowship. The centre of this "togetherness" was found in the Sacraments, strictly guarded, and reserved for the upright and unblemished life. Thus, in the view of some historians of the *Apostolic Age*, the sacraments themselves became the bond and the guardian of Christian Unity.

The religious and social influence of the faith found a further and sure ally in the fact that home and church were closely compacted together, inasmuch as there were no ecclesiastical buildings in the range of time covered by the New Testament. This tended to simplicity of worship. "The older religions consisted mainly of pompous ceremonies administered by a priestly order; they required a priest and a temple and a set occasion for the elaboration of ceremonies. The Christian Church is enshrined in the home, in the workshop, along the marts of trade; wherever there is a heart open, there is the altar of our faith."¹ Paul salutes Aquila and Priscilla and the church which is in their house; he taught the Ephesians publicly and from house to house; he greets "Philemon, our sister Apphia, and our fellow-soldier Archippus, and the church that meets in your house."² It is an evil, perhaps a necessary evil, of religious life in

¹ *Traits of the Twelve*, Schell, p. 280.

² For an illustration of domestic Christianity, among both rich and poor, the student may consult *Pagan and Christian Rome*, Lanciani, p. 2.

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the city, that often the preacher has an audience, but too seldom a household of the faith. From this hindrance to intensive influence, primitive Christianity was saved; for even the noble basilica of a later time scarcely compensated for the loss of "the church in the house."

Yet, opportunity, discipline, and the organisation of the brotherhood are not the Gospel, and do not account for the victory of the Church. They are only among "the things that accompany salvation" like the subordinate figures in a conqueror's *triumph*. But the Christian salvation itself is in nothing external; it is born of that religious experience which glows in the words of *the golden Psalm*, "O my soul! thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord."¹ This spiritual decision made a man a Christian, and from it there flowed all else, "Sight, riches, healing of the mind." His religion began in an act of adoration, in the surrender to Jesus as Lord of his life. By nothing less—for primitive Christianity is sure that Christ must be given His own unique and peerless place in the religion that is called by His name. The earliest documents (the letters of Paul) speak of Him as "the Lord from heaven," "Head over everything for the church which is His Body, filled by Him who fills the universe entirely." He is not *another* man, round whom, in the gathering devotion of the years, a legendary halo of divinity has appeared, but from the very first, in the thought of the Church, He is supernatural, transcendent, above all the angelic rulers, authorities, powers, and lords.² We have seen that there were differences between

¹ Ps. 16.

² Eph. 1²⁰⁻²³.

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the Judaic and Gentile wings of the Church as to conditions of membership and the Ceremonial Law, but these, acute, and in some aspects important though they be, do not belong to the centre of the Faith. In *Acts* there is no dubiety or dispute as to the interpretation of the Person of Christ. His supremacy as the object of Faith, and the fact of His Resurrection, were beyond controversy: "Jesus Christ is the centre of the New Testament." Regarding the Resurrection, some Corinthians doubted their own, but there was no uncertainty among them "that Christ rose from the dead on the third day." As early as A.D. 57, without fear of challenge, Paul can write, "This is the gospel once preached to you, the gospel you received, the gospel in which you have your footing, the gospel by which you are saved."

We ought to make this as emphatic as possible, for there is a danger of attributing the progress of Faith to wholly external causes and thereby finding a Christianity without Christ. Gibbon does so in the fifteenth chapter of *The Decline and Fall*, in which he reveals his bias against supernatural religion. Professor Hume Brown¹ quotes Sainte-Beuve as saying, "When Gibbon speaks of religion, you would think he was a mandarin," and proceeds: "What he meant was that Gibbon dealt with religion in a purely external fashion and that he was incapable of understanding its real nature and the modes of its working. He records with all his mastery of lucid exposition the external events of the Christian movement. The problem, as it presents itself to Gibbon, is one simply of dynamical

¹ *Surveys of Scottish History*, pp. 10, 166 ff.

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forces, these forces being the clashing interests of sects and parties, the vanity and ambition of individuals, the superstition of the masses. . . . Of religion as an instinct in man, a force that lay behind all doctrines and institutions, behind the policies of statesmen and ecclesiastics, Gibbon had no conception."

Both St. Peter and St. Paul testify to the *aloneness* of the conquering Name in the work of the world's salvation; that they and their fellow-labourers went everywhere preaching "Jesus and the Resurrection" is testified broadcast over *Acts*; the "Name" becomes a synonym for the content of the Gospel. In Jerusalem and Samaria, in the coast towns of Palestine and in Damascus, over Asia Minor and at Corinth, Athens and Rome, they preached Christ; not merely picturesque facts about Him, but Himself, in His character and saving power. All other causes were but secondary to the divine Personality of Jesus: "When He ascended on high, He led a host captive, and granted gifts to men."

For such a Redeemer the world was hungering and thirsting. The epistle to the Hebrews welcomes Him in the glowing words, "Such was the high priest for us, saintly, innocent, unstained, lifted high above the heavens." Apologists have told us how congruent the Gospel is to human needs; it was never more so than in its first approach to the multitudes, for it was the answer to the inarticulate pain of the world.

'Tis the weakness in strength, that I cry for! my flesh that
I seek

In the Godhead! I seek and I find it. . . .

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... a Man like to me
Thou shalt love and be loved by, for ever ; a Hand like
this hand
Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee. See the
Christ stand !

In old-world thought there were two contradictions, with a gulf between that neither philosophy nor ancestral religions could bridge. God and the World stood apart like lines that can never meet ; even the later Judaism, giving up the problem as insoluble, could only fill the vacant spaces with a heavenly hierarchy of angels, principalities, and powers—*yet Him they saw not*. The communion, which the best spirits of heathendom cried for, was unattainable.

But what had been hid from all the sages was the open secret and the good news of the Gospel. "In Christ, God reconciled the world to Himself." "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." The World, Love, God—an amazing trinity which the wisdom of the ages never knew, for God had been the great Uncertainty—"Oh that I knew where I might find Him !"

The Gospel made men very sure of God : not Zeus, or Jupiter, or even Jehovah, but the God of Jesus ; they saw His glory in the face of Christ whom the preachers proclaimed everywhere. And thus the world won the new thought of God, His nearness and the love wherewith He regards us ; humanity was no longer fatherless in a fatherless world. The Evangelism of the New Testament was the discovery of God, revealed in Christ.

We have spoken of the needy and helpless world into which the preachers came. Even yet, the

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most pathetic thing in a minister's experience is to meet men and women in their sin and sorrow, and to read in their eyes that dumb blank feeling of not knowing what to do or where to turn when the dark hour comes upon them. But in the first century the desolation was complete, they were "without God and without hope in the world," where passions and grief made men like hunted creatures, all the more that a revived sense of sin had driven them out of all the commonplace refuges.

Luke is very emphatic on the subject matter of gospel-preaching—Christ and the Forgiveness of Sin. One finds it everywhere, in the forefront of the message that brought gladness to the world. In this respect *Acts* and the Pauline Epistles interpret one another, since for the most part they were almost contemporaneous. Nothing is more impressive than to read in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians the ghastly catalogue of vices with which his converts had once been chargeable; followed by the words, "And such were some of you: but ye were washed, but ye were sanctified, but ye were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God:" in the light of these words it has been easier ever since to say with all the Creeds—"I believe in the Forgiveness of Sins." The proclamation of it is in Paul's commission, "I send you to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive remission of sins, and an inheritance among them that are sanctified through faith in Me."¹

Forgiveness relates to the past, and finds varied

¹ *Acts* 26¹⁸.

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expression ; as if it were the erasing of a writing from a parchment which had become the scroll of fate, or the cleansing of a stain from a spotted garment, or the bath of repentance. But what of the days and years that follow ? Who shall guarantee the new life ? A modern poetess laments, " If only I could love my God and die, but now He bids me love Him and live on " ; and the pathetic words touch the standing problem of the Christian life. To this the Evangelism of the Church brought its satisfying and efficient answer. Repeated reference has been made in these pages to the dynamic of the Gospel, a strange new gift, whose efficacy in Christ's hands never fails—

He breaks the power of cancelled sin,
He sets the prisoner free.

Such is the hidden, quickening stream of power that flows into the life of the forgiven. The record stands to show the conduct and bearing of the Christians whose " pure and austere morals " were not overlooked by Gibbon ; the reality was written in large letters on the consciousness of the time. For this religion was not, as in later times, a secluded or a negative life ; but they lived in the full current of beneficent activity, abounding in the virtues, social and religious, that adorn character : " doing works worthy of repentance." ¹

They had been called not to be lookers-on at life, as if theirs was to be " a fugitive and cloistered virtue," but they were consecrated to the imperative service of goodness. And the dynamic of this—where was it to be found ? Bunyan describes it as

¹ *Acts 26*²⁰.

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"The man with a vessel of oil in his hand, of the which he did also continually cast (but secretly) into the fire"; and he adds, "This is Christ, who continually with the oil of His grace, maintains the work already begun in the heart." The Puritan preacher calls it "the oil of Grace." Chalmers thinks of it as "the expulsive power of a new affection." We speak of "the dynamic of the Christian life"; but primitive Christians felt it as the music to which their steps were set—"Now unto Him who is able to keep you from falling and to make you stand unblemished and exultant before His glory." ¹

In her memory the Church cherished the Advent word which hailed her Lord, "You will call Him Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." He had come into their life, which, through Him, became free and glad in the service of God and man. Luke is fond of miracles, but the greatest which "this Greek enthusiast for Christ" knew was the miracle of Jesus Himself. By His personality the new life began: "He hath shed forth this which ye now see"—life from the Life, light from the Light, and love, because He first loved us.

The criticism has often been made, that the man of non-theological mind neither appreciates nor understands the doctrines that are supposed to make Christianity; as if religion were a set of opinions however correct, and not "a Way of Life." But the Evangelism we have described had its irresistible appeal, because it recognised that the heart of religion is "the practik part." To-day, to take an outstanding example, we do not

¹ *Acts* 26²⁰.

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speak so much concerning guilt, and we have been assured (one knows not on what kind of authority) that men at the present time are not worrying about their sins. Well, every age has its own vocabulary to express truths which are as old as creation. But if the guilt of sin has receded into the background of thought, the bondage of it (call it weakness, unfitness, or inhibition—the name does not matter) is a sad reality. We still lament, “I see the better part and I approve it, but I follow the worse”; and this witness¹ to a bad conscience which is almost contemporary with the Apostolic Age finds timeless expression in Paul, “Miserable wretch that I am! who will deliver me from this body of death?” And he alone could give the satisfying answer, *God will*. “Thanks be to Him, through Jesus Christ our Lord!” A famous man of science having made, all in vain, many experiments in search of a religion, through many prophets of the soul, confessed that last of all, in despairing hope, he tried Christ, and He did not fail. May it not be, that the world, now unresponsive to the preaching of guilt (which, after all, is not a gospel), is thirsting to hear about the Evangelism of Power “to pour fresh life on every part, and new create the whole”? Next to a new heart, and indeed inseparable from it, God’s best gift to man is the dynamic of a new life, “The promise of my Father upon you, power from on high!” So “the scum of the city became the light of the world.”

In this chapter an endeavour has been made to show that primitive Christianity did not beat the air with an uncertain or irrelevant message. It was

¹ Ovid, 43 B.C.—A.D. 17.

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closely related to the longing of the age for God and communion, for salvation and certitude, for pardon and power. It revealed Christ as really an Infinite, meeting each individual and his every need; for early Christianity, in its symbolic use of the Old Testament, loved to speak of Him as the hidden Manna, which, as the legend says, tasted to each one like the food he liked best. Christ had something for "every man." Accepted by Jew and Greek, in the proud boast of the Church He had also become the Light of the World and the Bread of Life to the Barbarian and the Scythian, the bond and the free.

Doctrines and Theology (strictly so called) occupy a small space in *Acts*; what we find is a sure instinct for the one task of the Church, to witness for Christ, to bring all men under His influence; not to propagate a doctrine, but to proclaim a Person: "That ye may walk as He walked." Every story of conversion in the book has, for its aim, to win people into the shining road where the richest discoveries of life may be made; and how this attraction succeeded one may read in the winning of the Roman Empire.

The spell of this ancient truth and of the Person who embodies it is still felt even by men who do not call themselves by His Name. Describing these, Principal Lindsay¹ says, "They speak of our Lord as the one unapproachable figure, the one inimitable example for all human conduct. They appreciate keenly what Christianity has done for the world: they recognise it to be the most important factor in human history; they admire it in others, they

¹ *College Addresses*, p. 8.

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would fain have it for themselves." The saying of the French *savant* who had been reading the story of Paul's conversion expresses the mood of many: "If I only knew where the road to Damascus was—the road on which Paul met the Lord—I would go and walk there."

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CHAPTER XIV

THE SOUL OF ST. LUKE

“ This Greek enthusiast for Christ.”

IN the judgment of Renan, the third Gospel is “ the most beautiful book that has ever been written.” If the style is the man, the endeavour, therefore, ought to be made to trace the qualities of mind and heart which give such distinction to the writings of Luke. Harnack’s eulogy, which we have quoted above, reminds us that to live with the eye on the object is the pathway to reality, and to influence upon others as well.

The prologue to the third Gospel is excellent Greek prose, but students of the New Testament will recognise in it a higher value, inasmuch as the preface takes us into the confidence of the author by disclosing to us his literary methods and preliminary studies. This “ peep ” through the window of a writer’s workshop shows us how Luke prepared himself for his task. As to the facts on which the narrative is based he wins our confidence by the assurance : “ I have gone carefully over them all myself from the very beginning ; to write them out in order for your Excellency, that you may know the solid truth of what you have been taught.” This profession of industry and fidelity applies also to *Acts*, for the Gospel is but the first part of “ the Beginnings of Christianity.” How often we find

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ourselves wishing that Providence had not arrested the pen of the historian, and that he had enriched us with the third book, which was clearly in his intention! Many a dark place, and darker explanations of it, would be illumined. This devotion to careful and orderly research has given Luke his high place among the historians of the world; for, as Longfellow reminds us, "The secret studies of an author are like hidden piers, but on them he builds the bridge of his fame."

Concerning the origin of Luke, modern authorities, for the most part, have been content to follow the Church historian, Eusebius, in that opinion which the Vulgate reproduces: "Luke, by nation a Syrian of Antioch, by profession a physician, a disciple of apostles, and afterwards a follower of Paul." Confirmation of the statement is sought in his frequent allusions to Antioch in *Acts*; there is also the addition the Western Text¹ makes to *Acts* 11²⁷, which runs, "And when *we* were assembled together"; but the conclusion that Luke was with the apostles in Antioch, at this early period, will depend on the value attached to the MS. in question. Ramsay, however, is inclined to push the connection still further back, and to argue that "Luke had a family connection with Antioch," though, directly, he was a Macedonian. The question is still in suspense.

But it is more important to remember that, with the possible exception of the author of *Hebrews*, the physician of Antioch is the only purely Gentile writer in the New Testament; from his frequent references to proselytes or "God-fearers," he is

¹ Codex Bezae.

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supposed to belong to their circle; while the evidence of vocabulary and tradition is overwhelming, as Harnack cites it, for the belief that he was a physician.¹ Paul, writing to the Colossians, calls him "the beloved physician"; the adjective, which is clearly a synonym for *my*, is a tribute to the professional care with which he watched over the frail tabernacle of the great apostle during the strenuous years of their association. Though his name (a contraction for *Lucanus*) and profession are held to indicate that he belonged to the class of freed men, this hardly rises higher than a credible conjecture.

Much more interesting is the question of his religious nurture. That he had a familiar and loving intimacy with the Greek Bible is apparent in his vocabulary and in the masterly knowledge he shows of the contents of the older revelation.² This familiarity may be held as proved to demonstration. Where, and by whose influence, he came to the Christian faith there is no record, not even a hint from which one might form an opinion. Perhaps some wandering missionary, possibly from Cyprus, dropped the seed into that honest and good heart.

At Troas (in 49 or 50 A.D.) he first passes "into the drama of *Acts*," for at this point the personal narrative, the so-called *we passages* or travel-diary begins. In it the writer speaks in the first person, and reveals the hero-worship which burned in his heart to the end. Together they crossed the Ægean, and reached Philippi, where Luke remained behind. But he rejoined Paul as he returned

¹ *Luke the Physician*, p. 175.

² Harnack, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

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through Macedonia on the fateful last journey to Jerusalem. They were together in the city and also for two fruitful years in Cæsarea, where first-hand knowledge was to be found concerning the earliest days of the Church. In the eventful voyage to Rome, Luke was by Paul's side as his attendant and physician.¹ The imprisonment he did not share; others are called fellow-prisoners, but Luke remained at liberty.

Let us remember, however, that he was no otiose spectator of the triumph of the gospel. When "the pious Æneas" begins his account of Troy's last overthrow, he prefaced his narrative with the words, *quorum pars magna fui*—"In these events I had a principal share"; Luke similarly records his own qualification as a historian, and in his diary makes clear his part in the great mission. "As soon as (Paul) saw the vision, we made efforts to start for Macedonia. . . . On the Sabbath we went outside the gate to the bank of the river, where we thought there was a place of prayer; we sat down and talked with the women."² "Luke also, with St. Paul, was therefore a missionary preacher"—not only an onlooker or hearer, but a messenger of the word, the evangelist-historian.

Though the scope of these pages does not include either Introduction or Criticism, a word may be allowed on the estimate of *Acts* by recent scholarship. The date of the book, once carried down to the end of the first century, and by extremists to

¹ One recalls Dr John Brown, the modern "beloved physician," with his Lukan gift of portraiture and style, and warm human sympathies.

² *Acts* 16¹⁰.

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an even later period, has now been placed in a time almost contemporary with the events described. Wade¹ writes: "Harnack holds that *Acts*, up to 27²⁸, was written during the second year of the Apostle's imprisonment (61 or 62 A.D.), and that verses 30, 31 are a postscript added soon after a change had occurred in his situation." Even if this date be considered too early, we may nevertheless take it that, in Luke's history, we are in direct contact with the middle years of the first century; signs, indeed, are not wanting, here and in Germany, that scholars are now returning from their excursions into the second century.

The narrative itself has been subjected to a searching examination, out of which, except in one doubtful case (the allusion to Judas of Galilee in 5³⁷), Luke's accuracy has emerged untarnished. In the matter of official names and designations, which in those days were always changing, he is better informed than his critics. He knows the *proconsul* of Cyprus, and the self-styled *prætors* of Philippi, and the *politarchs* of Thessalonica; indeed, wherever we can test him, he is found correct.

This means much to the ordinary reader, since it is a real aid to faith to know that we can rely on *Acts* as a thoroughly accurate, first-hand, and personal account of Christian Origins. Everyone has praised the literary quality of the book, its emphasis and its balance; and this felicity extends to the fine finish, where the triumphant word *unhindered* is chosen to bear the last stress.

These, however, are external things, which the plain man does not estimate at the value placed on

¹ *New Testament History*, p. 252.

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them by scholars. We do not multiply instances of them; for the ordinary reader who loves his Bible may find it more acceptable to have a picture of Luke in his feelings and interests—to have a summary and review of the religious ideas in his book. This will bring our task to a conclusion.

In previous pages we have spoken of *Acts* as our only history of the Apostolic Age; apart from incidental references in the epistles we have no other. Its importance may be measured by asking, Where should we be without it? The first and decisive years of the Church would have been a blank, and, as the history after 70 A.D. really enters into a long tunnel, the darkness would have been dark indeed. But this book has been a lamp and guide in the most interesting and germinal years of the Faith.

The aim of *Acts* has been defined as the answer to the question, "What think ye of Christ?" With perhaps needless iteration we have turned frequently to this aim, all the more because, for the uses of to-day, it is essential to remember that the question holds the first place. We have found no dogmatic theology in the book, though, here and there, one seems to trace the germs of a simple creed and liturgy; but though formal doctrine is absent, in every line religion itself is presented as a Force and heavenly Power working out the regeneration of society.

That Luke "materialises the spiritual" has been admitted; it was the habit of the time to express religious ideas by concrete and personal forms. In the episode of Philip and the eunuch (*Acts* 8) we can see this usage at work, where he exchanges angel

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into Spirit: "An *angel* of the Lord spake unto Philip," v. 26, becomes in v. 29, "And the *Spirit* said unto Philip." This shows that Luke is working with fluid conceptions, and that we should not force "the letter." We have already referred to a similar case where, in the outset of the Macedonian Mission (*Acts* 16⁶⁻⁸), "They were forbidden by the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia" (v. 6), but in v. 8 (R.V.) the same prohibition appears as "The Spirit of Jesus suffered them not." Professor Andrews¹ interprets this difference in his note: "There can be little doubt that, in the mind of Luke, and probably of the Early Church, there is no clear distinction between the 'Spirit of Jesus' and 'the Holy Spirit.'"

These examples point to the free and undogmatic character of the book as a whole, and many will take it as a recommendation that *Acts* presents religious ideas in a concrete fashion. Every preacher knows that the abstract cannot be assimilated by ordinary church-folk, who fail to apprehend doctrine except it be clothed in the example of a real personality. In this respect there is no better textbook of Religion than *Acts*, better than creeds and better than catechisms, for in it we find the flowers growing by the wayside, or freshly gathered; whereas in the formularies of the Faith, they have all the dryness (not to say mustiness) of the herbarium and museum. Might we not go to *Acts* for the verification of Religious Experience?

Thus our study of the book has discovered in the author of it a man of rich and pleasing variety and the impression of a mind open in all directions to

¹ *Westminster New Test.*, "Acts," p. 203.

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the most vital things. He is a man of prayer, and tenderly garners the work and the victory of it; his conception of the Spirit, as God in the world making history, and changing, as in the case of Paul, the direction of a man's life to a new goal, has endless applications to the tasks of every day. Not inaptly Luke has been called the Apostle of Philanthropy, and the Apostle of the Catholic Hope, in which, with marked sympathies, he includes also the pagan world. *Acts* is full of such golden breadths in the harvests of the soul.

And then his interests! In both the Gospel and the History Luke, in the best sense of the word, is a Christian Socialist, who is glad to see his fellows "helping lame dogs over stiles." Above all, we owe to him the report of our Lord's sermon—the Nazareth Programme—addressed to an audience that never seems to grow less—the poor, the broken-hearted, the captives, the blind, and the bruised. Luke, in another passage, notes that Jesus bade a man who had two coats give one to a needy brother; but on the same page he adds the counter-command to the soldiers to be content with their wages (rations). One has only to be in camp even for a few days to appreciate the realism of the wholesome advice. All depressed creatures, the sick in mind or in body, appeal to Luke's heart. He is the Evangelist of the helpless and the poverty-stricken, and knows also their gratitude, for his optimism never fails—"Love had he found in huts where poor men lie."

We have seen his interest in converted women, and the steady eulogy of their work. Like our Lord Himself, Luke saw in the Samaritan villages

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fields white unto the harvest (*Acts* 8²⁵), "a trait," says Harnack,¹ "which is wanting in both St. Mark and St. Matthew"; this interest, however, is also shared by the Fourth Evangelist. The spiritual affinities between "John" and Luke are so close that this scholar feels "there is something to be said for the view that 'St. John' had knowledge of the Lukan writing though no real evidence can be adduced in its favour."

Objection has often been taken to the so-called bias in *Acts*, for the author, by intention or otherwise, passes lightly over the differences between Judaic and Gentile Christianity. But, before Luke wrote, the victory of freedom had practically been gained, and it is not in his temper to stir up hot ashes, which charity and the aim of his narrative forbade; besides, for didactic uses, cold detachment may not be among the best gifts of the historian. Perhaps we should be thankful it is granted to few!

But, above all, we hold as a treasure for ever the recollection that Luke, more than all the other evangelists, shared in Christ's love for sinners, a love not only of souls, but of men; and in Gospel and History he exalts the Cross as the permanent witness to divine love. To the practical influence of this in the Church's work, two allusions from modern literature may be added. Matthew Arnold, on the day of his death, after having heard the hymn of the Cross sung, said: "Yes, the Cross remains, and, in the straits of the soul, makes its ancient appeal." The second reference is to a Swiss scholar, Amiel,² who, like Arnold, though

¹ *Luke the Physician*, p. 155.

² *Journal*, p. 171.

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intellectually refusing the orthodoxies, yet in his heart believed that Christ lifted up draws all men to Himself. This writer has said: "When the cross became 'the foolishness' of the cross, it took possession of the masses. And in our own day those who wish to get rid of the supernatural, to lighten religion, to economise faith, find themselves deserted, like poets who should declaim against poetry, or women who should decry love. It is the forgetfulness of this psychological law which stultifies the so-called liberal Christianity. It is the realisation of it which constitutes the strength of Catholicism."

Nor should it be forgotten in our estimate that Luke has the high distinction of having, definitely and fully, made joy one of the springs of Christian character and work, and, like Dante, he has made his story thrill with the hymns and anthems of the Church. Prayer and praise become the liturgy of service and its inspiring breath.

In the story of the jailer at Philippi we recognised Luke's estimate of "the house," meaning "the family." Other instances are familiar: Cornelius, who revered God with all his house, is bidden send for Simon and "he will tell you how you and all your house are to be saved." So, also, Crispus the Corinthian believed in the Lord with all his house. This identification of the house, with the souls that dwell in it, we owe to our author.

Such considerations might lead to the conclusion that Luke was a man wrapped in all the warm domesticities which are the safeguard and haven of life. But the reality was far different, if tradition may be trusted; for in it Luke is described as a solitary man with neither wife nor children, wander-

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ing from place to place with the one consuming passion—Christ, and nothing but Christ. Myers' fine tribute to Paul extends to his fellow-worker :

Yes, without cheer of sister or of daughter,
Yes, without stay of father or of son,
Lone on the land and homeless on the water
Pass I in patience till the work be done.

He perished, as report says, in Bithynia by a martyr's death, leaving as his memorial two books, in which, more clearly than in any other, we may read the soul of a Christian. In his death this Greek enthusiast for Christ fulfilled his hero's and his own brave words that "through many a trouble we must enter into the Kingdom of God."

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